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Sri Rama Krishna Vivekananda Seva Sadan

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FORMS OF THE DIVINE

SWAMI VANDANANANDA

IN VEDANTA a spiritual aspirant can choose to worship any one of many gods and goddesses and divine incarnations, always remembering that all these are varying aspects of Brahman, the one supreme being. Why are there so many forms of the divine in the spiritual practice of Vedanta? Because there are so many people in the world wanting different objects to love and worship, and Vedanta anticipates a liberal intelligent person's question, "Why limit man's choice in the spiritual field?" We all know that the divine, the Lord, is indefinable. If someone could tell us, "He is only this, and not that or anything else," and thus give us a clear-cut and yet complete definition of the divine, or if we could do this ourselves, then we probably would be in a position to accept the one form only and give up all other forms. But is this possible or is there a person who could talk from genuine personal experience and give us such a single and rigid conception of God? Neither Krishna nor Christ, neither Moses nor Mohammed, neither Buddha nor Ramakrishna has done this. They all speak of God's infinite manifestation and unlimited expression.

In some religious systems sometimes the claim is made that the form of the divine which they worship is the only right form and that all other gods and prophets are not true or genuine. They seem to say: "Worship this one form of the

divine. It only can save you. Why do you have to have so many forms?" To this, one from the Vedanta tradition could say: "Well, suppose I do not like the form you advocate? If you give one coat of a certain size to all and then insist, 'If it fits you, wear it and be happy; if it does not, then go without it and be unhappy forever,' you will be limiting God's glorious infinity and man's potential divinity." Vedanta wants to prevent such dogmatic exclusion of any sincere and serious devotee of God from the religious path. Why should anyone be left without a form of the divine, of his or her own choice, in order to think of God, love God, and meditate on God? If we are without some chosen form or symbol of the divine, our spiritual progress is retarded. For without form the divine is beyond human conception. And if God lies beyond our mental effort, our spiritual practice in our daily lives becomes more or less an empty formality.

Is ethical life without the divine practicable? We all know about leading a good life, that God is there, above us, somewhere, watching us, looking after us. But in the depth of mind and heart can we establish any intimate relationship with him? The Lord is watching, but where is he? We do not know. We only know of him from hearsay. And the proof that God is there is inferred from the supernatural law that provides us with rewards for doing good and punishments for being bad. But we never get to see him who bestows these rewards or punishments, and we never even ask questions about him. A dogmatic theologian is apt to say: "Do not ask about God, or what he looks like. Do good, and avoid evil. Follow ethical life, the right kind of life. You get rewards from the Lord because he is pleased." But a sincere spiritual aspirant may feel: "Why, the preaching priests, who have never seen God themselves, may have invented this dogma to make us live right! It looks like a trick. Otherwise why do they

discourage us from asking more and more questions about the Lord and about our desire to know him and contact him directly, intuitively?" To insist on the "good life" as an imperative, and yet declare that God is beyond our realization through his infinite manifestations is to defeat the very purpose of the good life. If man is looked upon as a born sinner, a small creature, he can never become one with God. But union with the divine is the goal of true religious life. It is wonderful to be aware that the Lord is watching over us, cares for us, and loves us. This is a great step towards the goal of complete union when we can talk to God and have constant recollection of and communion with him.

Yet, without God what is the point of ethical life? Why should we be consistently good? Yes, when we are in a group we should be good, because other people see us and we don't want to get a bad reputation. One can understand that. But when we are alone, when nobody is watching us, why should we be good in mind and at heart? When we are absolutely alone, what makes us feel, "I should be ethical; I should always think well of people; I should never have an evil thought"? What is the force, the motive, in my individual which makes him ethical when he is not in company, and not being watched? The Vedanta says man's relationship to the divine, the direct relationship of every individual with the Lord alone can make him truly ethical and righteous. Otherwise he will be acting in society, in groups, like an ethical man, but not so within. And that creates a split personality. The Lord, the divine, is present everywhere. If you are living a good life but do not associate it with God, in the long run ethics by itself will not satisfy you. We have to utilize forms of the divine and relate our ethics to them. In this way, we may think of ethical life as one more step in the spiritual evolution of man.

The modern idea of evolution accepts man as the highest. When you reach a human form, there seems to be a stop —we have evolved to the highest. So a human being should be fully satisfied. Yet, there is the urge to evolve more. Why? Let us investigate the evolutionary process, as described in Vedanta.

Vedanta first mentions inanimate life, such as rocks. It is still called life. For the Vedantist, everything is living. What is living in rocks? Apparently nothing; but Brahman is there. Brahman is everywhere, even in the seemingly inanimate life. So we start with Brahman in what we think to be dead matter. Next in the evolutionary process is plant life, the vegetable kingdom. It shows growth, but no extensive movement yet. Then we proceed to the animal kingdom. Animals show one more quality: movement, locomotion. In the animal, there is growth, there is movement, and there is mind. In the highest animal, man, there is motion, growth, mind, and one more thing which we call in Vedanta *buddhi,* the intellect. So, man is related essentially to all existence down to the rock, if you accept the evolutionary theory of Vedanta, which says Brahman is present in all.

But after we have reached a stage of intelligence, do we stop? No. For man again can be divided into three types: *tamas* (stupid, lazy), *rajas* (restless, passionate), *sattwa* (calm, pure). So after arriving at the human level, what is the next course of evolution? The Vedanta says it moves from tamas to rajas, from rajas to sattwa. No human should stop until he has reached the state of sattwa, which is tranquillity and light. Light does two things: first, it removes darkness, ignorance; then it gives joy. In the state of sattwa a person will have a clear intellect, fully lighted; and will have joy. He remains cheerful even when the elements of rajas or tamas try to pull him down. Not that he is always undisturbed. A

quality like sattwa can be disturbed by the other two qualities, but a sattwic person quickly regains his tranquillity and balance.

How do we progress from tamas to rajas, and from rajas to sattwa? Through spiritual practice. But you may ask, "Where is the Spirit in this process? You have not even mentioned the Spirit! You just said the intelligence of man should be made pure and perfectly tranquil and that is called sattwa; but where is the Spirit?"

Even the man of sattwa, having attained perfect tranquillity, has not reached the highest. The highest goal of human life is to see God, to be united with the Lord. That is what the Vedanta places on top of the evolutionary scale. You are really evolved as a human being if, having attained the state of sattwa, you go beyond all the gunas. For even this tranquil state is an egoistic state. But when you unite with the Lord there is no egoism left. That is the evolution we are aiming at through spiritual practice, and that is the Spirit. God is beyond our ordinary minds, but he is in us as Spirit. So the word Spirit in the Vedanta means Atman (God indwelling). We think of the Lord as both immanent and transcendent. He is the all-pervading one; he is present everywhere. But also he is the most intimate to every one of us. All religions speak of God as the ultimate goal. We have heard that mentioned time and again, and we try to move toward that ultimate. But he is also the most intimate.

How do we realize the truth within? Shall we be able to reach it? Is it within our range of accomplishment? A few have done it, but what about the rest of us? We want some experience, some feeling that it is possible: some kind of a hope. To that the spiritual teachers say, "All right, begin by

thinking of the Lord, who is the ultimate, as within you." We should practice thinking of him in one of three ways, or two, or all three ways:

(1) Think of him as the *Kalpataru*. In Vedanta, the Kalpataru means one who gives you whatever you want: the wish-fulfilling tree. This is a mythological tree. You stand under it and ask for what you want, and you get it. Similarly you can get whatever you want from God. You may ask for something pleasant, but within two days it may be a little painful. If you ask for such a thing, the Lord fulfills your desire. For the responsibility of asking is on you. By taking this attitude toward the Lord: "He is the one I shall turn to for whatever I want," you get closer to him. Whatever desire comes, you have to ask of him. The idea is to bring the mind to divine consciousness directly. Make the Lord the most intimate one to you, wherever you are, alone or in a crowd. You begin by asking for many things, but later on you will not ask for as much. And as you progress your desires change; your demands differ. As you move from tamas to rajas, you ask for less, and when you really come up to the sattwic state and you get closer to the Lord, you are surprised at yourself that you ask him for devotion and knowledge. You don't have the need for anything else. Therefore begin by thinking of him as the wish-fulfilling tree.

(2) Think of him as the one who is our innermost being. What is the effect of such an approach? Many thoughts arise within us and we believe not a soul has known of them. Thoughts appear and disappear constantly and we forget them. But the Lord knows about them. He is our innermost being. Look at the advantageous position the Lord is in! You cannot escape him. Whatever thought you have, good or bad, the Lord knows about it, because he is your innermost being. You may hide your thoughts from everybody else, but

not from the Lord. This awareness brings purity of heart.

(3) Think of the Lord as one who is full of all the blessed qualities you can imagine. Not the pleasant qualities, but the good and noble ones. Where is "good" personified? In the Lord. He is present within you as the repository or treasury of all the good qualities that you can conceive of. Ordinarily, although we possess whatever is good, we keep looking for it outside. Why? We want to see an example. Where is the glowing example? If we can see that, we feel happy. We are seeking for ideal goodness, ideal love, and the ideal human being. But the Lord is inherent in the ideal, and he is also in you as the real.

The idea that you have the Lord within you makes every thought become related to him. How? Any thought, as you know, is more or less related to matter. And what is matter? Name and form. Can you think of anything which has no objective relation, which has no form in your mind, or no name? You cannot. Even an "idea" has a picture, a form. Any thought that comes into the mind has a form and a name. When we are told, "Think of the Lord within your heart," we try, and then we say, "What is the Lord like? How shall we think of him? What is his name, or has he a name? We have been using the words 'Lord' and 'God,' but is there anything that is his own name?" The saints of all religions answer with their own experiences. They say, "Do you want to know the name and the form of the Lord, as we have realized him? We shall tell you." So we have in every religion, and especially in Vedanta, the name and form of the divine, of the supreme being, available to every one of us. Think of the Lord as the innermost being. At the same time, know his name and form. It helps the mind to settle down. There is no more vagueness or blankness in the mind. One feels, "Here I have something to think about, related to the divine."

Now when you go to find a name and a form as realized by the saints of different religions, you may meet with a variety of religious experiences, ten saints that have had ten types of experience. It is natural, for we are all different, and the forms we envision, the experiences we have, are different. A beginner asks, "Well, then, shall I think of any form I choose, or who decides what form I should pray to?" Do you really want help? Then go to a guru, a teacher. Here is a person who can study your mind and tell you in advance what form of the divine you must concentrate on. The one to whom spiritual life is really important will not hesitate to go to a teacher and find the truth. He will not go on struggling in the wilds and avoiding help.

Most of us privately recognize the fact that we do not know how to proceed in spiritual life. Therefore we should get instructions. And what does the guru do? With all the forms before you he helps you select a "chosen ideal." Then you worship and meditate on this form of the divine which you know is not something which people have invented. It is one of the forms which have been divinely revealed and traditionally accepted. It is real; it is genuine.

Cultivate that form and name of God at the time of meditation, during prayer, or any time. With a name and a form to focus on, the mind gains concentration. Gradually, you have a divine relationship established within you. This chosen ideal is the innermost being; he is father, he is mother, he is your closest companion. Whenever you are in need of him, he is with you. That is the best way spiritual progress can be assured. Otherwise people may go through many kinds of practice, but how are they sure of what they are doing?

How fast can we progress? Suppose a little progress is attained in five years. Does it prove that spiritual life is no good? The guru will say, "Carry on, with patience, another

five years." But you feel you have to set a limit. You say, "Well, I shall try for two more years, and if nothing happens I'll conclude it is no good." Swami Brahmananda told some of his disciples, "All right, set a limit, but follow the correct method, the method that will insure you some accomplishment, not just anything that you like. And if you don't succeed after following the prescribed method, come back and take me to task." So to be properly guided in spiritual life, the teacher is again the best book, the best of everything. Always refer to him.

The teacher gives the aspirant the chosen ideal, and the form and name of the divine. As the latter practices, what happens to that form in relation to all the other forms of the divine? Suppose one worships Ramakrishna; another worships Buddha; another worships Jesus Christ. All forms of the divine relate to the one Divinity. This is very important. We want to think of the Lord as expansively as possible. But it involves a natural and gradual process of the human mind.

Most of the time the mind seems to be scattered among ideas. But constantly there exists an inner question: "What is the *ideal* in life? What is the ideal for me? Where shall I go from here?" When a man has arrived at the stage where he is asking for an ideal, what do you tell him? Tell him the ideal is God-realization, union with God. The mind must find a way to that realization. After the ideal is decided upon, the mind asks for the "idol"—the hero, the one to whom it will be attached: namely, the form of the Lord. At the stage where people have ideals but do not find the proper "idol" they will begin to deify the wrong things and identify them with their ideals. Therefore we need an "idol" or symbol to worship. That is why we have in Vedanta what many people mistakenly call "idol worship." Idol worship simply means symbolism, and symbols must be rightly chosen or they may

mislead us completely. When you worship a picture, a statue, or a clay image, the Vedanta wants us to make sure that we do not get overly attached to the picture or the material object. The mind has to be lifted from the material to the spiritual. Vedanta gives the idol and at the same time tells us to do a ritual which makes us remember the One beyond the idol, the One which this idol represents. During the worship you place the Lord within and without. So the form of the divine, outside, in the material form, helps you to get the form well established inside. The ideas of the divine bring us to our ideal. The realization of the ideal needs the use of the idol or symbol.

AFTER that, we come to what we call individual experience. Once you have experienced the Lord even a little when you meditate, you feel wonderful. He is in the heart. The form comes to you clearly. Whenever you want to think of him, by practice, the form of the divine arises within. After that you forget the idol, the shrine, everything outside. Why? You have him. What more could you want? Once you have the form clearly established in your mind, in meditation you become almost centered in the Self. This is a higher state than before—a withdrawing into the heart where only you and the Lord are present.

But do you stop there? No. The next step is from the individual to the universal. So these are the five steps: seeking and yearning give us ideas of the divine; from idea to ideal; from ideal to "idol" (or form); from the idol an indrawn gaze into the individual shrine of the heart; and from there we move to a universal concept.

It seems to be a big step: from the individual to the universal. But the form of the divine which you have in your

heart leads you to the formless. It is not a big step after all, for the Lord himself shows the way. Once you feel that the symbolic form is one with the divine, the symbol and the universal God are no longer separated. The chosen ideal is in fact the Infinite.

Suppose you touch the ocean, for instance, at Laguna Beach. You can truthfully say that you have touched the Pacific Ocean. Another, standing miles away, thousands of miles even, can touch the same Pacific Ocean. But it does not matter what part of it you touch or he touches, for this vast ocean is all one. The same thing applies to the Lord, to your form of the divine. If you can really touch it, very intimately, a vision will come. An opening will come in the intellect; it opens to reveal that you are touching the ocean of Supreme Divinity. All forms of the divine are various points of this one ocean of Brahman: *Sat-Chit-Ananda,* absolute existence, absolute knowledge, absolute bliss. All forms of the divine are but aids to the mind, that we may progress toward infinite realizations—that Truth is one, that God is one, and though one, is experienced in various ways.

VITAL QUESTIONS ON RELIGION ANSWERED

SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA

Q. If God is present in everyone, how do you explain people like Hitler?

A. God dwells everywhere. God dwells in the heart of the tiger too, but that doesn't mean that you have to go and hug the tiger. It is just like this: The self-luminous sun is shining; but rain clouds have gathered and it seems to us that the sun has disappeared. Actually the clouds have not affected the luminosity of the sun; it continues to shine behind the clouds. Similarly, God dwells in a Hitler too and remains unaffected by the thoughts and deeds of the man. The man reaps the fruits of his karmas (the consequences of his thoughts and deeds), and suffers. But through such suffering his character will be purified, and in some life he will wake up and realize his divinity.

Q. Very often when Christian theologians or scholars try to compare Christianity with the other religions, particularly those of the East, they say that all of the religions have some truth in them; but there is the insistence that the other religions are man's attempt to reach God, while Christianity is God's movement down to man—God's attempt to reach

man. In other words, the implication is that the Eastern religions express primarily man's effort, opposed to God's initiative or grace which is so strongly emphasized in Christianity. Could you comment on this?

A. I am very glad you asked this question because this point is so often misunderstood. You know, in order to understand any religion one has to be *inside* it, under a teacher or guide. The knowledge of Brahman is imparted by the guru to the disciple. Otherwise it cannot be known.

Now, in regard to your question, let me quote from the Upanishads: "The Atman (the indwelling God) is not known through study of the scriptures, nor through subtlety of the intellect, nor through much learning; but whom the Atman chooses, by him is he attained." And the saints I have lived with in India, men and women who had seen God, each one of them taught us: The vision of God cannot be had by human efforts. It comes only through divine grace. My master often said: "Is God a commodity like potatoes that he can be bought with so much prayer or meditation?" So I don't see how people can claim that Hinduism minimizes the element of grace.

But here is the point: Self-effort is needed in order that the heart may be purified. Spiritual disciplines and practices help us to open our hearts to God's grace. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "The breeze of grace is always blowing; set your sail to catch it."

Q. How can we live successfully in the world but not be of it?

A. Everybody has to live in the world. We monks also have to live in the world. I remember a disciple once asked Maharaj whether anybody can find God while living in the world. Maharaj answered: "Where else would one live?"

But remember, let not worldliness attach itself to you. How to keep worldliness away from you? By attaching your mind to something greater, something higher. The only way to live in the world and not be attached to it is to attach yourself to God. Let your hands work, go about your business; but keep a part of your mind in God, knowing him to be the one reality, the eternal truth. He alone is your very own. We have to convince ourselves that there is one object of love, one being who really loves us—and that is the Lord. He is your very own. You belong to him. Have that awareness; then you can live in the world and nothing will touch you.

Q. Can you explain why the Lord will one day seemingly take an active part in our affairs and the next day, in a very similar situation, stay completely aloof?

A. Isn't it your own mind that changes? When you are in a good mood you think the Lord is taking an active part in your affairs, and when you are in a bad mood you think that he doesn't concern himself with your affairs at all. God is always the witness. He is indifferent to your merits or demerits. All he wants is your love. But how can you love God unless he gives you that love? He is very miserly when it comes to giving devotion. So you are in a dilemma. What to do? Weep before the Lord and pray that you may have pure love for him. That is the only way.

Q. In trying to practice discrimination and renunciation I find that enjoyment of anything outside meditation constitutes distraction and on such grounds should be avoided. Good-by to music, movies, and nonreligious books! Yet these things make me feel good and give me a sense of beauty, and the difficulty is that I don't yet enjoy my meditation. What to do?

A. What is meant by renunciation? The giving up of lust and greed. Renunciation becomes natural when we are able to keep our minds fixed in God constantly. But at the beginning of spiritual life it is impossible to compel the mind to think of the Lord always. Now struggle to think of God at least occasionally. Practice prayer and meditation; chant the name of God regularly. Then with every new effort the power to concentrate will grow and you will love to meditate.

In the meantime, what are you to do? You should have some relaxation. If the distractions do not rouse lust and greed, they are not bad and will not lead you away from God. So be practical. Hear good music, go to the movies, read non-religious books. If these things give you some peace and a sense of beauty, let them remind you of Him Who is Beauty Itself.

Q. Can a happily married couple find God and/or the Truth together?

A. Well, I don't see why not! I wish that all of you happily married couples may remain together happily. If you move together toward God, one can help the other. Marriage is an institution which provides opportunities to learn control and to be selfless. If both of you devote yourselves to God you will remain happy together, and surely you will realize the Truth.

In our Hindu scriptures there are many examples of householders who became great devotees. The ancient rishis, the seers of the Vedas and Upanishads, were married people.

Q. Swami, how can we learn to distinguish between what is the Lord's will and what is our will?

A. There is just one way. Do you feel the presence of God and remember him? If you do something and consider

it God's will and have forgotten God, then you may be sure it is your own will.

Q. How can we learn to keep the mind in God?

A. Practice! Try! Then one day you'll look at someone. Suddenly you'll think: There is the presence of God. You'll look at the sky and feel: Oh, there is God! Someone will be talking to you and you'll have the awareness: That's God's voice.

One can do this when one begins to fall in love with God. Then recollection of him comes automatically. Just as when you were young and you had a sweetheart. It was no trouble at all for you to think of him or her. Your mind did it automatically. In the same way, when your heart is filled with God you think of him.

Q. Must we try to keep the mind completely still in meditation?

A. Meditation is a struggle. The restless mind wants to run everywhere. A disturbing thought arises. Immediately you must raise a contrary thought. Desires come into the mind. Chant the Lord's name; that will drive them out. Perfect calmness and tranquillity—these come later.

Q. How can feelings of lust be controlled?

A. Keep your mind engaged in chanting the name of the Lord. If lust persists, go into your room and clap your hands and chant the name of the Lord loudly. This will free you from lust. Of course you have to have the desire to be free. Prayer is answered, but you must be sincere.

Q. How can we make ourselves want to meditate?

A. The secret is doing it. When the mind is concentrated

on a subject, interest arises. But it takes time. Once you begin to meditate regularly, you will find that there is joy in the thought of God. Practice! Practice!

Q. Why is it easier to meditate at certain hours of the day?

A. There are four times during the day and night which are considered especially conducive to meditation: dawn, midday, sunset, and midnight. At these hours, nature takes on an attitude of calmness. Take advantage of these hours whenever you can.

But after all, where do we meditate? In our own minds. Therefore, any time you meditate is beneficial. Later on you will be successful in your meditation wherever and whenever you meditate. But in order to reach the stage where you can become absorbed in God regardless of external circumstances, it is very important that you practice the spiritual disciplines regularly at the same time every day.

Q. What meaning can spiritual awareness have for a middle-aged person?

A. Middle-aged or old—it makes no difference if there is the desire for spiritual life. And if the desire arises, no matter at what age, you are blessed. I know this from personal experience.

Many years ago, in India, an old man who had lived a very wayward life arrived at our monastery and said: "I want to stay here. Give me a room and some food." Everything he owned he had just handed over to our abbot. After some time my master came to visit our monastery. When he saw this old man he turned to me and asked: "Where did you find this saint?"

So, middle age or old age, it doesn't matter if you want

God. After all, where is God? He is within you, he is your very Self. Sri Ramakrishna expressed it so positively. He said: "Everyone can realize God, because God is the Self in every being." But you have to want to know the Self.

Q. How can fear be overcome?

A. It is very difficult. We fear so many things for so many reasons, imaginary and real—and most of the time imaginary. We fear things that will never happen. A man becomes fearless when he has the love of God in his heart. We have a saying in India: "Fear is fearful to approach Him."

Q. Are there any particular disciplines that can lessen fear?

A. The only discipline I know is to keep the mind fixed in God. In order to fix your mind in God, chant his name as often as you can. When you think of God you are in the sanctuary. Nothing can touch you.

Q. When you chant the Name, should you also keep the vision of the Chosen Ideal before you?

A. That's the best way—think of him and of his presence as you chant the name of God.

Q. Is it permissible to chant scriptures silently during meditation time since this is an aid to focusing the mind, or must we control the mind purely by an effort of will?

A. Try to control the mind by any feasible methods or means.

Q. Does the Lord give you the grace of your own mind?

A. What is the grace of your mind? It is the desire to

struggle in order to unfold the divinity within. A little struggle is necessary. Unless you take one step toward the Lord he does not stir. But take one step, and the Lord comes down a hundred steps toward you. So, self-struggle is very important.

Q. Can one incarnation of God be greater than another?

A. One divine incarnation may manifest greater power than another, according to the needs of a particular age. But remember, it is always the same God, the one supreme Spirit, who comes to re-establish his truth.

Q. Does art have a place in yoga?

A. Everything has a place in yoga if you use it in order to realize God. Yoga means union with God. If you make art a means of worship, then it will lead you to yoga.

Sri Rama Krishna Vivekananda

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SHANKARA

T. M. P. MAHADEVAN

AMONG the pathfinders to the Eternal, Shankara stands preeminent. He spent his entire life—short though it was—in urging his fellow men to turn from the ephemeral to the abiding, from the fleeting panorama of temporal life to the spiritual felicity of the life eternal. So far as earthly living and its demands go, there is no distinction between men and animals. Shankara gives expression to this fact aphoristically thus: *pashvadibhish cha avisheshat* ("As there is no distinction from beasts," etc.) and goes on to explain that there is no difference between the behavior of men and that of animals so long as the moving factors are appetition and aversion, and activity consists in a going forth towards the external sense objects. But man is endowed with a certain other characteristic which, if properly cultivated, will make for a distinction. Shankara defines this characteristic as the eligibility for karma, willed action, and jnana, knowledge, and cites in this connection a scriptural text which says, "The Atman is expanded only in man. He, indeed, is most endowed with intelligence. He gives expression to what is known. He sees what is known. He knows what is to come. He knows the visible and the invisible worlds. He perceives the immortal through the mortal. Thus is he endowed. But with the other animals, eating and drinking alone constitute their knowledge." It is because of this special endowment of ability to discriminate and discern the truth that birth as a human being is said to be

precious (*jantunam nara-janma durlabham*). It is in virtue of this endowment that man quests for the eternal, and eventually succeeds in gaining it.

Explaining the first word *"atha"* (then) in the first aphorism of the Brahma Sutra, Shankara sets forth the qualifications that would make one eligible for the quest eternal. The qualifications are: discrimination of the eternal from the noneternal, nonattachment to the finite enjoyments of this world as well as of the other, the possession in abundance of virtues like calmness and equanimity, and a longing for liberation. The first of these is the initial qualification that is essential for the Vedantic inquiry to start. At this stage, discrimination does not mean the final knowledge of the truth. It only implies that philosophical attitude which refuses to be deceived by the first look of things. What blinds the vision is narrow attachment to selfish enjoyments. These may pertain to this world or to the heavenly world. The mind longs for them and so is unable to see the truth. When it is in the grip of passions such as appetition and aversion, it cannot understand even empirical truth, and so it goes without saying, says Shankara, that the mind needs must be thoroughly cleansed before it can realize the truth of the inner self. The mind that has been freed from passions should then be strengthened by the cultivation of the cardinal virtues. The right attitudes must take the place of the wrong ones. Rid of its defects, the mind must acquire the excellences. It is then that the aspiration for release will firmly get established in the mind. This aspiration should not be confused with any passionate desire. Explaining the point, Sureshvara, Shankara's disciple, says that the longing for the supreme happiness which is release is not attachment: if this be attachment, then the wish for solitude, etc. should also be so, which is not the case.

Release which is regarded as the highest value is the

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same as the supreme Self which is the sole reality, according to Shankara's Vedanta, known as Advaita. It is this reality that is referred to in the Upanishads by such terms as Atman and Brahman. One may deny everything else, but not the Self, for it is the very nature of the one who denies. In the empirical world it appears as limited and as many. As conditioned by the psychophysical complex called the body and by the things that constitute the world, it is spoken of as "experience" (*anubhava*). When these conditions are removed it is known as the Self. Thus says Bharatitirtha, a distinguished Advaita-teacher of the fourteenth century: We wrongly imagine that the Self is the subject of transmigration and that the world in which this happens is real. The truth is that the Self neither rises nor sets, that it is the one constant consciousness which is self-luminous. The Self that is nondual and eternal is the substitute of the pluralistic universe which is an appearance of maya. Maya veils the real and projects the non-real. It is through the sublimation of maya that the illusion is overcome and the true Self realized.

Self-realization is *moksha* (release); in fact, the Self itself is moksha. This is not what is to be newly gained or accomplished afresh. It is the eternal nature that remains unrecognized on account of ignorance. The Self is eternal, not in the sense of the perpetuity of a flowing river: nor in the sense in which the denizens of the heavenly world, the gods, are said to be immortal because of their long life: the Self is absolutely eternal. Moksha is its very nature, and so it is *nitya* (eternal) and *anarabhya* (what is not begun).

It is because moksha is the eternally accomplished end that Shankara maintains as against the Mimamsaka-ritualist that action is not the means to it. Anything that is wrought by action is bound to perish. Through action one of four results may be obtained: origination, attainment, purification,

and modification. Release is different from all of these. The Self which is of the nature of release is not what is originated, attained, purified, or modified. That which obstructs the realization of the true nature of the Self is nescience: and this can be removed only by knowledge. The opposition between knowledge and action, says Shankara, is unshakable like a mountain (*jnana-karmanor virodham parvatavad akampyam*). It is only to the one that is nonattached to works and their fruit and takes to the path of knowledge that the Self which is Brahman is revealed. The path itself consists of study, reflection, and meditation, *Shravana, manana,* and *nididhyasana.* The knowledge that is aimed at through this process is not mere intellectual understanding but intuitive and direct experience. The competence to tread the path of knowledge is gained by the performance of one's duties without attachment to results (karma yoga), constant and undivided devotion to one's chosen form of the Deity (bhakti yoga), and the discipline of mental concentration (dhyana yoga). Possessed of this competence, when one pursues the path of inquiry to its end, the knowledge of the nondual Spirit dawns, even as the sun rises at the termination of the night. The analogy of sunrise is particularly apt because what really happens is not the rising of the sun but the removal of the obstruction that prevented the sight of the sun. Similarly, the moment ignorance is dispelled through knowledge, the Self stands self-revealed. It is this that is called moksha. One need not wait for realizing it till death overtakes the physical body. Even while tenanting a body one is released at the onset of knowledge. Such a one is called a *jivanmukta.* From his standpoint, there is no body at all. He seems to live in a body only for the unreleased. After a time when the body dies, we say "He becomes liberated from the body" (*videhamukta*). But, the truth is that there is no difference in moksha. When release

is attained, there is no further travail for the soul. It realizes its nondifference from the Absolute, which is called *advaita-anubhava* (experience of nonduality). "When all the desires that the heart harbors are gone," declares the Upanishad, "then the mortal becomes immortal, and attains Brahman even here."

To Shankara goes the credit of consolidating Advaita and of making it clear beyond doubt that, according to this philosophy, there is no need for final despair, no ground for ultimate doubts. No one may be barred from the quest eternal, for it is the common birthright of all. Distinctions may be meaningful in regard to other disciplines and practices such as ritual acts. But as regards Brahman and Brahman-knowledge, there could be no distinction based on time, place, and circumstance. Just like the great ones such as the sage Vamadeva of yore, says Shankara, we the moderns too, though weaklings, have a right to and can know Brahman.

THE STORY OF MIRA'S LOVE

SWAMI BUDHANANDA

THERE is a small but tremendous word in the English language which in its all-pervasive import spans the meaning of life. It is understood and cherished by all people everywhere in the world, whatever may be their stage of evolution in the scale of civilization, or in the intricate domain of (animal and) carnal passions and human sentiments. It is the motive-power which drives both the sinner and the saint and is the cause of suffering and joy, comedy and tragedy, bondage and liberation.

That word is "Love."

Everybody—of any age, of any nation, of any color, of any religion or no religion, of any politics—talks of love. Everybody seeks to love and be loved. Even God is not excluded from this. Those who know God from personal experience have said that God's soul-hunger is infinitely more intense than the soul's God-hunger.

Jalalul Din Rumi, the great Sufi mystic, gives us the feel of this truth when he says:

> When in this heart the lightning spark of love arises,
> Be sure this love is reciprocated in that heart.
> When the love of God arises in the heart,
> Without doubt God also feels love for thee.

In his powerful poem "The Hound of Heaven," Francis Thompson speaks of this quest of God for man's soul:

> I fled Him down the nights and down the days
> I fled Him down the arches of the years;
> I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways
> Of my own mind.

But with all his racing speed and skill of evasion, he could not escape "From those strong feet that followed and followed after."

Meister Eckhart says beautifully:

> Earth cannot escape the sky; let it flee up or down, the sky flows into it, and makes it fruitful whether it will or no. So God does to man. He who will escape Him only runs to his bosom; for all corners are open to Him.

Now, how did this extraordinary love affair, which in its unimaginable sweep involves not only the entire creation but also the creator, begin?

In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (I. IV. 3) we read:

> In the beginning, this universe was the Self alone in the shape of a person. He reflected and saw nothing else but His Self. . . . He was not at all happy. Therefore a person is not happy when alone.

> He desired a mate. He became the size of man and wife in close embrace. He divided this body into two. From that arose *Pati* and *Patni*, husband and wife. There (as Yajnavalkya said) the body (before one accepts a wife) is one half of oneself, like the half of the split pea. Therefore this space is indeed filled by the wife. He was united with her. From that union human beings were born.

In whatever light we may take this statement in the Upanishad, what we are expected to understand is that love is *Urdhvamulam;* it is, as it were, a creeper with roots in heaven. The source of love is the ultimate reality. It flows from God to creation. Again when this love is manifested in creation, in whatever form it may appear, in the ultimate analysis it is a movement from the creature to the Creator.

There are loves and loves. Loves covered with mud and filth, lost in sensuality and animality; and love crystal and iridescent, rising heavenward like a golden flame on wings of supersensuous flight, arousing ecstasy in God's own heart. No love is so fallen as will be completely bereft of the hidden touch of the Divine.

The reason for this is explained in those famous passages of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad:

> Verily not for the sake of the husband, my dear, is the husband loved, but he is loved for the sake of the Self (which in its true nature is one with the Supreme Self.)
>
> Verily, not for the sake of the wife, my dear, is the wife loved, but she is loved for the sake of the Self.
>
> Verily, not for the sake of the sons, my dear, are the sons loved, but they are loved for the sake of the Self.
>
> Verily, not for the sake of wealth, my dear, is wealth loved, but it is loved for the sake of the Self.

Thus continuing, Yajnavalkya, the great seer, instructs his wife Maitreyi that nothing in this world is loved for its own sake but for the sake of the Atman or the Self.

With this instrument of love God's creation is perpetuated, and souls are kept bound. The greatest use, how-

ever, that can be made of love is to take it back to its source, which is God, and capture God himself with the instrument of love. All other loves only increase your hunger and thirst, and leave you sometimes low and sometimes high, sometimes morose and sometimes frustrated. As the Holy Mother, Sri Saradamani Devi, says, the heart's innermost love should be given only to God. From all other loves comes affliction. It is only the love for God that can assuage the insatiable hunger and thirst of our souls for all time, because God is the very source of love.

This all-powerful instrument of love has been used by aspirants down the centuries to realize God. In the devotional scriptures of the Hindus one reads that love has been used in five different *bhavas* or attitudes, namely:

Shanta, the serene attitude of the seers of olden times. A quiet-flowing love, like the single-minded devotion of a wife to her husband.

Dasya, the attitude of the servant to the Master, like that of Hanuman to Sri Rama, as one finds in the *Ramayana,* the great Hindu epic.

Sakhya, the attitude of friendship—"Come here and sit, and share this fruit," which the friends of Krishna used to have for him.

Vatsalya, the attitude of the mother toward her child, like the love of Yashoda for Krishna.

Madhura, the sweet attitude of a woman toward her paramour, or of a bride to the bridegroom.

Of all these attitudes, in the last mentioned, the madhura bhava, are compounded all the other four attitudes. That is to say, this attitude of love for God can be considered to be more powerful than all the others because it includes

the entire gamut of love. "God as Lord is feared; God as father is revered; God as master is honored and served; God as Beloved and Beautiful is embraced." This union and communion of the soul with the oversoul is known in Hindu religious literature as the consummation of madhura bhava. It has also been called "bridal mysticism." The gopis, or cowherd maidens in the *Bhagavatam*, established an ideal of supreme devotion to the Lord for all posterity to wonder at.

In the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* (21) it is said:

> Verily it is indescribable—*parabhakti*, the highest form of devotion to Lord Krishna—it is seen manifest in the lives of the gopis of Vrindavan.

This love which is steeped in erotic imagery has often been an object of criticism by those who, to say the least, did not understand what they were criticizing. It requires a highly evolved devotee to penetrate to the heart of the supreme devotion of the gopis and to be able to understand its pure and superior character.

Uddhava, the great devotee, says in the *Bhagavatam*:

> I worship the gopis who in their infinite love for Sri Krishna renounced their all in the world, broke the unbreakable shackles of family life. I wish I were reborn in Vrindavan as a plant so that the dust of their feet may fall on my head and purify me.

"Bridal mysticism" has not been the monopoly of Hinduism. The theory of spiritual marriage in Christian mysticism is an identical concept. The key to this way of loving God was introduced in Christianity by Christ him-

self in his parable of the ten virgins and the Bridegroom.

The idea of spiritual marriage, or the gopis' way of love, was successfully cultivated by mystics like St. Bernard, Jan van Ruysbroeck, St. John of the Cross, and St. Teresa. One cannot read their lives without being convinced how all-consuming was the love of the Bridegroom.

IN India, the exalted woman mystic Mirabai is one of the finest examples in history of this all-consuming love for God. The very utterance of the name of Mirabai fills the Hindu mind with inspirational devotion.

In Mira India saw the gopis' devotion to Krishna, resurrected and revivified in the great spiritual tradition.

Though Mira's songs are sung everywhere in India by millions of people, in temples and monasteries, wayside inns, and even in movies, we do not yet have a universally accepted version of her life. Research is going on. Here we shall follow a version which appears to be more acceptable than others for various reasons.

Mira was born the daughter of Ratan Singh in the early 1500's, at Kudki village in a royal kshatriya family of Rajasthan, an area of Central India. Many of the heroic sagas of Indian history flow out of the life of these sturdy people, the Rajputs, who lived in Rajasthan.

In this martial race of the desert regions a new type of blossom was Mira, heroic, not on the battle front, but heroic in devotion, in self-abandonment at the feet of the Lord.

When Mira was three or four she seized upon the idol of her life from whom no power on earth could separate her. One day a venerable monk came to her father's home and stayed overnight as guest. The monk carried an image of

Giridhara (a name of Sri Krishna) for his daily worship. During his stay at Ratan Singh's house, while he was worshiping the deity, little Mira felt irresistibly attracted to the idol, and wanted to make it her own.

But the monk was not at all ready to part with the image of his chosen ideal which he had so long worshiped. Mira threatened to fast—the power of the aggression of this small girl's love was felt. The monk, however, was ready to give away anything he had, but not the idol of his heart.

In this duel of love Mira became victorious, for the Lord himself indicated in a dream preference for Mira. And the monk bent sadly over the image, and with trembling hands gave it to Mira, wiped his eyes, and wended his way in the vastness of the world, musing on the strange ways of the Lord.

Readers of the life of Sri Ramakrishna will remember how in a very similar way Jatadhari, a Vaishnava monk, who had come to stay for a few days at Dakshineswar, had to leave behind the idol of his life, Ramlala, because the deity had expressed a preference for Sri Ramakrishna.

The mysterious telepathy that transpires between the Lord and his chosen devotees is not comprehensible to us. But let us not depend too much on our little discursive intellect and reject such phenomena disrespectfully only because we do not understand them. Most mystic experiences happen beyond the bounds of reason.

You can imagine how great was Mira's joy at the triumph of her fancy. But perhaps you cannot imagine that this image of Giridhara could become the center and sole joy of her life.

Children are clever creatures. They know very well how to extract toys from the unwilling hands of parents

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by just twisting their lips and shedding a few tears. Mira was more aggressive and assertive, and what she got she did not throw away as children do with toys when their interest wanes.

One day after this incident, when a marriage procession was passing by their home, little Mira asked her mother most anxiously, "Mother, where is my *dulaha*?" The bridegroom is called "dulaha." The word also means the beloved. "Giridhara Gopala is your dulaha," said her mother, pointing at the image and smiling at the innocence of the child. But the mother perhaps also remembered what little Mira had told her of a dream in which she was married to the Lord of the Universe.

However, the seriousness with which the child had taken her mother's words was revealed, to the bewilderment of many, as she grew up. The language of her heart was recorded in her song later on:

> I have none else for my husband
> But Giridhara Gopala,
> On whose head shines the crown
> Of peacock feathers.
> He is my husband.

When Mira was about eight her mother died, and she came to live with her grandfather Dudaji who was a devout Vaishnava, a worshiper of the supreme Lord in the form of Vishnu. At her grandfather's knee Mira listened to the spiritual lore of the land, like the Mahabharata, with rapt attention.

As far as she was concerned Mira knew she was already married to Giridhara Gopala. But nobody else took the marriage seriously. When Mira was about thirteen her

father gave her in marriage to the Prince Bhojraj, the son of Maharana Sanga, King of Mewar, whose capital was at the city of Chittore.

Coming to live in her husband's home, Mira disappointed almost everybody. When, according to the family tradition, she was taken to the family shrine, where the Divine Mother was worshiped, Mira declared that she did not offer obeisance to anyone but Giridhara. This startling defiance could not be understood by her new relatives. Was Mira insane, or a bigot? To the family she appeared irreverent and arrogant.

The mind of the mystic of Mira's type does not function in an ordinary way. She was passing through a stage when to her the real and spiritual marriage with Giridhara was superseded by a somewhat unnecessary and unreal marriage with a prince, for whom she had little need or love. She was already committed to one husband, her God and her all, who was Giridhara Gopala. At this moment of high tension she found the necessity of making obeisance to another deity like a denial of her loyalty. How could she, whose heart was given away to one, have any worship to offer to another? Or what was the point of offering obeisance when the devotion was for someone else? Would it not be hypocrisy?

Another reason for the disappointment of the family was that Mira did not bring with her any of the usual worldly yearnings of a young bride. In Rajput families, which were specially devoted to the cultivation of rajas, young women were not expected to be ascetics, but objects of pleasure, physical and mental. But Mira was totally of a different type. After marriage, her devotion to Giridhara increased and most of her time was spent in prayers and songs before the Lord. And she invited monks and holy

men and had religious discourses with them. None of her ways were liked by the family.

Mira was ordered to abandon her own ways and follow the conventions of the royal household, but she could not easily conform. The spiritual yearning in her heart was so keen that it was difficult for her to tread the ordinary household path.

So disciplines were imposed on her. Mira, however, reacted in her own way, and she sang in a song:

> All the dear ones of this household are creating trouble over my association with holy men and are causing great hindrance to my worship. From childhood Mira made Giridhara Nagara her friend and beloved; this attachment shall never be broken but shall flourish.

WHEN Mira was about seventeen, her husband Bhojraj passed away. In some literary works on Mira, Bhojraj is depicted as a jealous husband, who out of spite against his wife's devotion for God—which deprived him of the sweetness of his conjugal life—treated her badly. In some other works this is emphatically contradicted, and Bhojraj emerges as a somewhat melancholy figure who loved his wife dearly, but did not get adequate response, for Mira had given herself completely to the Lord.

In any case, after the passing away of her husband a new chapter opened in Mira's life. It was certainly the most trying period of her life and most fruitful too. It is said that at this time, Mira received spiritual initiation from a monk, Raidas, by name. Her widowhood, by itself, could only mean for her intensification of spiritual life. Now after receiving initiation from a spiritual teacher her spiritual

yearning and absorption, her longing for holy company, her utter disregard for the conventional ways of the world —all increased a thousandfold and created difficulties for her.

Meanwhile her father-in-law Rana Sanga passed away, and Prince Vikramaditya, also known as Vikramjit, became the Rana or ruler at Chittore. He wasted no time in extending disciplinary measures to Mira.

Mira's devotional practices were uniquely her own. She danced and sang before Giridhara Gopala. And she would lose no opportunity of associating with holy men. Her yearning for holy association was so great that she set aside all conventions of the royal household in order to get the inspiration of spiritual company. This hunger for holy company was naturally not understood by those who had not undergone self-purification.

Vikramjit, the Rana, now passed orders that Mira should give up her unseemly singing and dancing before the image and the even more objectionable seeking of the company of holy men. Was she not a woman, a widow? Then why so much anxiety to meet with men? Vikramjit did not hesitate to spread scandal against this purest of pure women.

When Mira was obstructed in her worship in the palace, she went to a temple outside, and there continued her spiritual practices in her wonted manner. Her supreme devotion and ecstasies soon attracted attention, and from far and near people began to flock to her, to give homage and to receive spiritual inspiration. This angered the Rana and others in the household all the more. Mira was now virtually made a captive in the palace and one inhuman torture followed upon another.

Mira was not only a lover of God, but an inspired poet. Her poems, which she used to make song offerings

to the Lord, give an account of what she had to go through at the hands of the Rana. You will be surprised how tremendous were the oppressions, but how easily Mira went through them. In one song Mira records her experience:

> Mira is happy in the worship of her Lord;
> Rana made her a present of a serpent in a basket;
> Mira, after her ablution, on opening it found
> the Lord Himself.
> Rana sent a cup of poison;
> Mira, after her ablution, drank the cup
> which the Lord had turned to nectar.
> Rana sent a bed of nails for Mira to sleep on;
> That night, when Mira slept on it,
> It became a bed of flowers.
>
> Mira's Lord averts all her troubles,
> ever her kind protector;
> Mira roams about in ecstasy of devotion.
> She is a sacrifice to the Lord.

MYSTERIOUS and various are the ways in which God's grace flows through the lives of devotees. When Bernard Shaw heard the news of Gandhiji's assassination, he exclaimed, "This is the consequence of being a good man in this world!" Gandhiji was a devotee of Sri Ramachandra. When a few days before his assassination a bomb had burst in his prayer hall, and Gandhiji escaped unscathed, people thought, "Who can destroy him whom God protects?" But a few days later God refused to protect him from the assassin's bullet. Again, Prahlada of Hindu mythology, who was a boy devotee of Vishnu, could not be killed by being trampled under the foot of an elephant, or thrown from a hill top, or by being administered poison, or various other ways. The

Heavenly Father did not save Christ from being nailed to the cross. Nor did anyone stay the cup of hemlock from the lips of Socrates. But Giridhara Gopala saved Mira in all possible ways.

Ordinarily we are bewildered when we study the various consequences of being a true devotee of God. Our difficulty in understanding grace arises from the fact that we have a gross view of devotion as an investment. I have loved God—so he must now become my policeman, doctor, lawyer or a lifeboat for me whenever I am in trouble. As a cash-return for devotion, we want security bonds from heaven. This in religion is racketeering and commercialism taking the various forms of the promissory notes of "indulgences."

Thus, grace is present not only when the poison turns to nectar; it is also there when the poison works. The Lord's grace is there when the good man graciously takes the consequences of being good. Mira took the poison not because she was in any way sure that it would turn to nectar, but because whatever was sent came from the beloved. The proof of grace is in this God-given capacity for ready acceptance of whatever comes from the Lord; and from the standpoint of the devotee the consequences just do not matter. When Pavhari Baba, the great Indian saint, was smitten by a serpent he exclaimed, "Ah, a messenger from the Beloved!" Good and evil, pain and pleasure, prosperity and adversity, life and death—all are messages from the Beloved. When we do not see this dual throng of opposites as acceptable or unacceptable, but only as a conferring of love from the Beloved, we have tasted bhakti or devotion.

The proof of God's grace is not in any incident, favorable or unfavorable but in the God-infused strength of the soul, which can accept anything that comes with joy

and resignation. It is not in what comes, but how you are given to receive what comes.

VIKRAMJIT was a harsh, insensitive man, and he thought undependable Mira required strict vigilance. So he appointed his own sister Udabai—because he thought that he could not depend on others to do this delicate job faithfully—and three other women to keep watch over her. Uda tried her best to change Mira's mind and ways.

An interesting conversation between them has come down to us and gives us insight into Mira's unworldly and fearless character.

Uda: Mira, give up this company of holy men. There's scandal in the city.

Mira: Let them spread the calumny. What's that to me? I am devoted to holy men.

Uda: Why don't you wear your pearl necklace and your precious jewelry?

Mira: I have thrown them away. Holy thought and contentment are my ornaments.

Uda: At other places one sees beautiful processions and congregations of men and women—and at your place assemble only all sorts of devotees of God.

Mira: Go to the terrace of the palace and see how wonderful is the assembly of holy men.

Uda: All people of Chittore are ashamed of you; and the Rana hangs his head low.

Mira: Chittore is free today—the way for Rana's deliverance is also open.

Uda: Your parents are ashamed of you. You are the cause of stigma to your birthplace.

Mira: My parents are blessed. My birthplace is also blessed.
Uda: Rana is angry with you. And he has kept poison for you in the casket of gems.
Mira: That is fine. I shall drink it as the sacrificial water.
Uda: That is not ordinary poison. The very sight of it will kill you.
Mira: I have none in the world. Mother earth will accept me.
Uda: Ranaji wants to know what is your path and aim of your life.
Mira: My path is sharp as the razor's edge. Rana will not be able to reach that region.
Uda: Don't be disobedient to the Rana. Obey him. If he is angered there will be no shelter for you.
Mira: Uda, Giridharilal is my only refuge. I pray to him with all sincerity.

But Uda failed in her attempts to convert Mira to her way of thinking. Mira lived in her own world; threats or allurements of this world had little sway over her.

However a conversion took place, not of Mira but of Udabai. The touch of the philosopher's stone burned the base metal into gold. Vikramjit had much faith in Uda, for he thought the latter was his loyal follower. But holy company is an explosive thing. One day, forgetful of the world, alive only in her Lord, Mira was passionately singing this song:

> Since I have met Him, my friend, I have
> said good-by to all decorum and modesty;
> none pleases me—none can fetter me.
>
> Ah, the peacock crown He donned and
> the beautiful mark on His forehead!

> Who in the three worlds can resist His charm? All succumb to His enchantment.

As Uda listened to the outpouring of Mira's soul in her song and supplication, she experienced an inner transformation and fell at Mira's feet, asking to be taken as her disciple.

This was the end of one type of vigilance and beginning of another for Uda. Her transformation was instantaneous. Pining to have the vision of Giridhara, Uda begged Mira to get her that vision. Mira was by nature large-hearted; and she was so deeply moved at Uda's yearning that her heart swelled in prayer and she begged her Lord to fulfill Uda's yearning. It was midnight. Uda and her three companions, Mithula, Champa, and Chameli were all seated in the shrine, Mira was pouring out song after song in her celestial voice. To their utter amazement, all on a sudden Giridharalal appeared and said, "Mira, why are you so very deeply agonized tonight for me?" Such was the incredible fruit of holy company, that not only Uda but her three companions who had not specially craved for it all had the vision of the Lord.

Perhaps noticing that Uda was no longer trustworthy, Vikramjit appointed special guards to keep watch over Mira's temple day and night.

At long last Mira was caught. At midnight the guard brought the news secretly to the Rana that Mira was "frolicking" with a person in the temple. Sword in hand, the Rana rushed to the shrine and finding no one, asked Mira, "Where is the man with whom you have been frolicking all this while?"

"My beloved is there standing before you. Then why do you ask me?" replied Mira.

The angry and self-righteous Rana, however, unable to see the Lord, proceeded to make a special search, when to his utter fright and dismay he saw the horrible figure of a man-lion confronting him. Valorous Rana Vikramjit swooned on the ground, sword in hand.

And Mira herself was not a little surprised, because the same Giridhara, who was sporting with her as the Beloved, had now assumed this horrible form to frighten her tormentor.

For the Rana it was too shocking an experience. Therefore there soon came an order from the Rana, ostensibly to save the prestige of the family, that Mira must leave Chittore. This was an order of banishment. For a lady of the royal household it was not an easy order to obey, but inside, Mira was a revolutionary and did not care what was in store for her. Was not Giridhara her beloved and her refuge? Before leaving she sang for the Rana's household firmly and frankly:

> If the Rana is angry, what harm can he do to me? Friend, I shall continue to sing the glories of Giridhara. If the Rana is angry, his own kingdom will give me shelter; but if God is angry, my friends, where can I go? Friends, I care not to follow worldly conventions, and shall unfurl the banner of independence. I shall row the ship of God's name and will cross the illusory world. Friends, Mira has taken refuge with the powerful Giridhara and will cling to his feet.

MIRA left Chittore, and the very goddess of fortune was gone as it were, from the capital. Shortly after her banishment, the waves of invasion in Chittore by Muslim chiefs began, at the conclusion of which the city was reduced almost to a mass of ruins.

For a while Mira stayed with her uncle at Merta, but as political misfortune overtook him, Mira was compelled to leave Rajputana. Her Giridharalal had probably a fancy to see the lady of an ancient royal family standing and singing the glories of his name on the dusty roads of this earth. Mira was now a veritable beggar, a singing minstrel, moving from one place of pilgrimage to another. In this most trying situation her dependency on the Lord increased a hundredfold, and in a ringing voice she sang her immortal song of renunciation:

> Father, mother, brother, or friend, I have none—
> Lord, for your sake I have given up all happiness—
> Do not forsake me now! Do not forsake me.

On this pilgrimage, there were moments when she felt that she was forsaken by the Lord. This, in fact, was only her hunger for his perpetual vision, and so like a neophyte she would cry:

> Lord, will you not grant me your vision before life leaves this body?

Though now homeless, Mira was not, however, alone. Such was the power of her wonderful songs, steeped in devotion, that crowds would follow her wherever she went. The supernal beauty of her purity, the regal dignity of her person, her infinite humility, her fathomless devotion, her fearlessness, absolute surrender, and her transmuting songs, gave a new sort of experience, even in India. For even in India, which has produced so many saints, Mira is unique. Such absolute love for God and such absolute renunciation have been seen both before and since. But the outpouring

of Mira's divine passion in song has such a special character that even among the melodious mystics Mira stands out as a singular saint whose very name has become an inspiration to spiritual aspirants for all time. Nobody knows how many songs Mira sang in the privacy of her soul to her Lord. We have now some five hundred on record. This is a highly valued treasure in our spiritual lore. It is impossible to sing or to hear Mira's songs without having an influx of Mira's passion for God well up in one's heart.

Wandering in this melodious way, spreading everywhere waves of devotion and yearning for the Lord, Mira came to Vrindavan, the great place of pilgrimage for Vaishnavas. In his lifetime Sri Krishna's sport with the gopis was enacted in the sylvan surroundings of Vrindavan, and the gopis were the greatest devotees of Krishna, whom they worshiped in the madhura bhava, the attitude of the beloved to the sweetheart. That was exactly the attitude of Mira to Krishna. Some even used to hold the view that Mira had herself been a gopi in her previous life. You therefore can imagine her joy in being at the place where her Beloved had sported, in his incarnation as Krishna. It was not all joy, however, for the constant remembrance of Krishna agonized her heart beyond description and she pined for the constant vision of the Lord. When the devotees became aware of her extraordinary love for Krishna they began to throng around her for inspiration. Her devotional singing, or *bhajan,* attracted crowds.

Nor did Mira lose any opportunity of associating with holy men. At that time Jiva Goswami, the great disciple of Sri Chaitanya, was living in Vrindavan. Mira sought an interview with him. But the saint, a hyper-rigorous ascetic, refused to see Mira because she was a woman. On being refused an interview, Mira sent the monk a note which

brought him new enlightenment. She wrote: it was surprising that the revered saint had not yet transcended the sex-idea? And that in Vrindavan, Sri Krishna alone is Purusha, all others are Prakriti. If the saint considers himself as Purusha and not as a gopi, it is better if he leaves the sacred place, where Sri Krishna once sported. The saint at once recognized that he was encountering a person of higher enlightenment and deeper realization. Without loss of time he met Mira, paid her his obeisance, and begged pardon, while Mira paid her respects to him.

Now this requires explanation: why did Mira say that Krishna was the only male principle and all others (men and women) represented the female principle? In short, this idea means that the creator God alone is the directive, operative, and active principle; whereas all created beings, the jivas or embodied souls, are only receptive and responsive principles. The Creator is the source of all energy and the creation is the vessel and the manifestation of the energy. Thus a mystic may look upon God as the only male principle and all men and women as representing the female principle.

Moving about in joy from grove to grove in Vrindavan, the land of Krishna's divine play, Mira sang one of her most moving and famous songs:

> Take me as your servant,
> O my Giridhara, my beloved,
> Take me as your servant.
> I shall work as your gardener—
> And in return shall have your vision.
> I shall sing of your sport
> In the bowers of Vrindavan.
> For being your servant,
> What a rich return I shall have:

Contemplation of your form,
Remembrance of your name,
Devotion to you—
Ah, what a rich return!
How beautiful is your form,
My darling with the peacock crown,
The garment bright as lightning,
The garland swinging on your breast.

O my cowherd boy,
O my flute player!
Daily I shall plant
New creepers to blossom for you,
And dressed in a yellow sari
I shall obtain the vision of you;
The yogi comes here to practice yoga,
The monk comes to perform austerity,
The mendicant comes to Vrindavan to worship God:
Inscrutable is the nature of Mira's Lord.
O my mind, have patience—
At the dead of night
On the bank of the River of Love
Your Lord will meet you.
Take me as your servant,
O my Giridhara, my beloved,
Take me as your servant.

From Vrindavan, after visiting Mathura and some other places of pilgrimage, Mira at last came to Dwaraka and settled there for the remaining period of her life. Like Vrindavan and Mathura, Dwaraka is also a place associated with Sri Krishna's life, and he is known there by the special name of Sri Ranacchorji. At the feet of the Lord, in the temple, Mira passed her days happily singing her songs. She learned Gujarati, composed songs in that language, and came to be adored by the local people as a saint with deep mystic experiences.

AFTER Mira had left the palace in Chittore, Mewar went through fire. Muslim invasion brought havoc to the entire kingdom. Chittore, the capital, was in a bad state, and Vikramjit, who during his rule had banished Mira from Chittore, was no longer the king. The new king, Udaisingha, was a God-fearing man, who realized that all their misfortunes were well deserved, for the royal family had ill treated saintly Mira. He lost no time in sending the most revered priest of the capital, along with some other dependable persons, to bring Mira back to Chittore from Dwaraka. But when they came to Dwaraka, notwithstanding their continuous, piteous, and persuasive requests, Mira refused to retrace her steps. She would not leave the feet of the Lord. What was Chittore to her? At last the messenger-priest took an extreme step and threatened a hunger strike, if Mira would not change her mind. This satyagraha of the priest perturbed Mira, for she could not see a man dying for her sake.

Helpless as she was, Mira entered the temple to take leave of Sri Ranacchorji, the Deity, and in piteous melody she sang two songs:

> Lord, you are the remover of miseries of all beings.
> O Giridharalal! Mira is your maidservant.
> Where there is misery
> There also is misery's remover.

The second song being:

> O my good and beautiful one,
> May your wish be fulfilled!
> I have none else to be kind to me.
> Without food during the day,
> Without sleep at night,
> My frame wastes away each moment.

O Giridhara Nagara, O my Lord!
Do not forget Mira,
May she be joined with you!

We are told that God takes seriously the prayers and supplications of souls that are pure and self-given. Mira's songs vibrated inside the temple and it would appear also inside the heart of the Deity, while ceaselessly the waves of the ocean broke on the seashore outside the temple. Mira was alone inside the temple with the Lord. Her plaintive melodies poured forth. The priest-messenger was waiting outside with his followers in the joyful expectation that they would ultimately be able to return to Chittore with the goddess of their fortune. The waves of the ocean rolled on. Time waited for none, and the door of the temple continued to stay closed.

When the door was finally opened from outside, the wonder was great indeed. Mira had vanished.

Sri Ranacchorji had not given her leave to go, he had taken her unto himself. Where did she or could she go? The temple was closed. The priest-messenger was sitting at the door. A thorough search inside yielded no results. Presently the plaintive sweet voice of Mira was heard singing the refrain of her last song:

O Giridhara Nagara, O my Lord!
Do not forget Mira,
May she be joined with you!

From where did the voice come? Was she hiding anywhere? Despite a search, Mira could not be found. She was not to be taken to Chittore, for she had returned to her eternal capital, the heart of the Lord. Mira, through the power of her love, had become physically resolved in the person of the Deity. The proof of this was revealed by the discovery of Mira's veil on the face of the Deity.

In the spiritual history of India there have been a few other cases in which the devotee became dissolved in the person of the Deity.

Andal, who was born with the same ecstatic love for Sri Ranganatha as Mira had for Giridhara Gopala, and refused to marry anybody else but the Lord, got dissolved, sucked, as it were, into the image of Sri Ranganatha at Sri Rangam. Her hymns, which are some of the most inspiring devotional lyrics in Tamil literature, are sung as a part of early morning devotions, especially in the months of December and January, everywhere in the Tamil-speaking areas of South India. It is also said that Sri Chaitanya, who was a contemporary of Mira, vanished in the same mysterious way in a temple in Puri. And a similar story is told about another celebrated Indian saint called Tukaram.

THIS is Mira's story, a life lived completely in search of God, with absolute and heroic unconcern for the world and worldliness; a life in which bridal love for God attained its astonishing fulfillment even as it did in the life of the gopis, a life from which flows an unending stream of inspiration to aspirants who tread the path of devotion to the Lord.

Mira is not just a heartbeat but the very soul-vibration of India. And why should one say "of India"? Mystics do not belong to any race. They belong to God as God belongs to them. Their true language is not just a spoken dialect but the yearning of the soul. Now, though we have narrated here all the known facts of her life, we must confess it is beyond our power to present the real Mira. For the real Mira is not the Mira of the happenings of her life, but the Mira of the hastening soul, the Mira of agony and suffering, of bleeding heart and scorched spirit; the Mira pining and prostrated by

separation from the Lord—and again the Mira of resurgence and beatitude in her union with the Lord.

If you want to have a glimpse of this real Mira, you must hear a musically gifted devotee of Krishna sing her songs with self-abandon. Then you will have a faint glimpse of the inner being of Mira. In her devotional songs Mira lives on. As we cannot conceive of the death of electricity, so we cannot conceive of the death of love. In bhakti (devotion), the bhakta (devotee) lives. Bhakti is not one-way traffic. It is a fusion of God's breath to the soul and the soul's response to it; it is the union of the bride with the bridegroom; it is the losing of oneself in the offered embrace.

At an early age Mira dreamed that the Lord had married her. She could even remember the imposing gate of the palace of God. From this time, when in reply to her question about her "dulaha," her mother had said that the deity Giridhara was her bridegroom, the one constant strain through her life was:

> I have none but Giridhara Gopala,
> On whose head shines the crown of peacock feathers.
> He alone is my husband and my Lord.

For this supreme union she had to pass through all sorts of travail which are reflected in her songs. She did not mince matters. She declared her love without hesitation. Her agony was too great to allow her the luxury of concern for anything else. It required her to be fearless, to be shameless, to be deprived of everything people hold dear in the world—home, security, prestige—and to undergo all sorts of oppression for the sake of the beloved. Even then he was not always to be seen. The love was given, but where was the lover? Mira's anguish knew no bounds:

My eyes ache for the sight of you;
Since you have left me, my Lord, I find no rest,
My bosom heaves at your name, your sweet name!
With gaze fixed on your path, I await your return.
The night seems long as half a year.
Oh, to whom shall I tell the pangs of my separation?
Friends, I feel as if a knife is cutting my eyes,
When will you meet me, O Lord of Mira,
You who bestow joy and allay pain?
For you, night after night, I keep vigil
And make the same lament.

In many of her songs Mira thus pours out her flaming agony—her unmitigated yearning for the Lord. There are other songs in which she delineates the sport of the Lord, and in some of them there is an inspiring description of nature and supplication as an aspirant. Some songs are autobiographical and in others she gives hints for spiritual life. After long separation and suffering there came the great moment of joyous union. And she sang:

Friends, my beloved has come home:
After long separation and agony
I have been united with my beloved.
I have greeted him with the waving of a light.
Ah, this return of the beloved,
In all his grace!
Let us sing the song of the joy of union,
The boundless joy.
My eyes swim in the ocean of his beauty.
Mira's courtyard is gay today.

Mira's bliss could not be taken away from her; her union could not be broken. So she confidently sings:

All-pervading one,
I am dyed with your color.

When other women's sweethearts
Live in foreign lands,
They write letter after letter.
But my beloved lives in my heart,
So I sing happily day and night.

After coming through so many trials and such anguish Mira could at last declare almost triumphantly without the least trace of vainglory:

I am true to my Lord:
Why should I feel ashamed,
Now that I have danced in public for my beloved?
I lost all appetite in the day,
And all sleep at night;
Now the arrow of love has pierced me,
And I have begun singing of the knowledge divine;
Therefore my relatives have all come,
And are sitting round me like bees sipping honey.
Mira, the slave of Giridhara,
Is no more the laughingstock of the world.

In a beautiful song Mira gives in arresting language the testament of her faith:

I have none but Giridhara Gopala,
On whose head shines the crown of peacock feathers,
He alone is my husband and my Lord.
Father, mother, brother, and kinsman—
None are mine.
I have flung aside my pride of family,
What harm can anyone do to me?
By keeping company with saints,
I have lost all worldly shame.
I have torn my veil of many hues
And covered myself with coarse apparel;
Pearls and corals I have cast aside
And put on a garland of forest flowers.

With my tears I have watered the creeper of love.
Now that the creeper has thickly spread,
Its fruits shall be joy itself.
With great devotion I have churned milk,
And butter I have collected;
He who wants may have the whey.
I was born for devotion's sake,
But the sight of the world made me captive.
O Lord Giridhara, save me now,
Says Mira, the maidservant.

That joy, that butter of life-spiritual, which Mira collected with great devotion, waits to be yours, if you would seek it, for your own joy, for your own bliss, for your own good.

WHAT VEDANTA MEANS TO ME

CLIVE W. JOHNSON

I AM merely a beginner on the path to self-knowledge. I suppose I consider myself, in all humility, a thoughtful person; hence, I try to devote a good deal of my time to a thoughtful appraisal of this life, to which our flesh binds us.

Vedanta has forced me to a rather harsh conclusion: life, as the majority of us live it, is vain. Most of our waking hours are spent in a series of unthinking acts which generally serve to increase anxiety instead of lessening it. To stave off lassitude, frustrations, and boredom, we introduce alcohol, drugs, sexual promiscuity, and other diversions into our lives —and end up suffering even more. Nothing really satisfies us; yet we continue, year after year, to believe (desperately, often) that things will somehow, miraculously, get better.

A cynic once wrote: "Life is short, brutal, and nasty." His definition is too short and his conclusion too nasty to suit me, yet I am forced to at least give him nodding assent. This world is *not* a Garden of Eden. Economic uncertainty, bodily disease, the potentiality of pain in all its forms are hounds which bay unceasingly at our doors. This, experience has taught me.

What Vedanta has taught me is that although the outside world is not an Eden, the inside world—that of our mind— can be. Vedanta convinced me that both the source of and

solution to the vast majority of our problems lie within the mind, not in the world outside; that peace, therefore, can only come when we have some measure of control over the restless wanderings of our thoughts—and when we are able to purify these thoughts. It is these convictions, I think, which have helped me continue the struggle to meditate, to draw the mind into the presence of God—if only for a few blessed, consuming moments.

How is it really possible to convey this immensely personal, insistent need for God? And yet it was just such a need, I am sure, which kept me attending lectures after a close friend brought me to my first one at the Hollywood temple in 1959.

A GROWING devotion slowly began to enter this "new life" of mine. True, it was hard to conceive what divine love was really like—love that by its very nature soars beyond the senses of perception—but wasn't this part of the religious struggle?

In this connection, I once recall reading where a Catholic father, who was spiritually advanced, was approached by an aspirant with the question, "How do I love God?" The father smiled and replied, "Just love him." His answer remained unchanged despite repeated attempts to elicit a more explanatory one.

Like this person I found myself asking similar questions, until I discovered that their answers (or many of them, anyway) lay within myself. But, of course, we still continue asking!

Vedanta has taught me to re-evaluate the whole meaning of prayer. The petitionary kind, I found, was much different from prayer that swells from the heart in search of divine

comfort—not divine favor. For the first time in my life I was hearing a minister say: "Pray to God with a loving heart; pray for the strength to love him" . . . with such sureness and conviction in his voice that I was almost helpless to doubt it.

Vedanta also introduced me to meditation. It seems remarkable that despite the great contributions of western philosophy and psychology there is so little concern with mental control. A quotation from the *Srimad Bhagavatam* somehow lodged itself in my memory: "Thus, when your mind and heart become calm and pure, you will learn to dwell in the consciousness of God. There you will find divine love." Now, in my own life, under the guidance of Swami Prabhavananda, I too was aspiring after that calmness and purity. But how sharp the edge of the razor!

I remember an incident two or three years ago which shook one conception I had of meditation. I was discussing with the Swami the attempt of some Zen Buddhists to empty their minds completely during "meditation."

"But what kind of meditation is this?" he said. "How can you meditate on nothing?"

His smile rescued me from total embarrassment.

As one might suspect, none of these new-found ideas became established in me overnight. The mind, long used to rejecting most things religious, had to be taught to *accept* things for a change. Faith must replace skepticism, cheerfulness help restore a balance in my life, and somehow, someway I had to develop an honest enjoyment of religion. The American Tragedy is largely the Puritan tragedy, and the equation of sin with joyfulness one of those mysteries still left unanswered.

This conversion to a new way of thinking about religion was not always easy. I had long regarded the average church-

goer with suspicion. To my mind he was a conservative and reactionary—a non-drinking, non-smoking namby-pamby. Of course, if he acted in the reverse of what you expected, then he was worse—a hypocrite!

Vedanta opened my eyes to the much greater, though perhaps hidden, strength necessary to pursue the religious life. Pause, it taught me, before casting stones of criticism. Even a dictator such as Napoleon declared, "tolerance is the greatest blessing of mankind," and yet I found myself presuming to criticize the greatness or smallness of world religions. What presumption, indeed!

Now I think I realize that by reproving or censuring others for their beliefs I am, in a sense, refuting the religion I have adopted—which accepts all true paths as threads leading to God. The important thing, it seems to me, is to stay on the path—regardless of which one.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

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been following had got me nowhere. Yet I did not feel I could withdraw from work. What else but work could I do?

Fortunately new light dawned. I came to realize that no one can contribute anything to God's projects. No one is necessary to the Lord. Whatever talent I may have—he can provide a score of workers with as much ability or more. Whatever efficiency I may manifest—he can easily get better results through other agencies. I cannot really do anything for him. I am not needed at all.

My attitude now is this. I can contribute nothing to God's world. But I am fortunate if he *lets* me work, or feel I am working. I am *privileged* if he permits me to think of him, to worship him, to draw close to him by imagining I am doing something for him. He does not need my help, but he allows me to work, or believe I am working, as a tangible act of adoration. He is like a mother who lets her child shell peas—which she could do ever so much easier herself—so that the child may love mother by believing he is helping mother.

Seen in this way, perhaps the idea of karma yoga is valid after all. The yoga of work succeeds when we finally know that work can never prevail. It operates eventually when work is turned into a gesture of love, when the daily round of our life is transformed into a sacrament. In removing the emphasis from me and my results, karma yoga rightly followed places emphasis upon Him; and the little efforts we must make, because we can do nothing else, become rituals, offerings, acts of meditation.



Vedanta and the West

Vedanta teaches that man's real nature is divine; that it is the aim of man's life to unfold and manifest this divinity; and that truth is universal. Vedanta accepts all the religions of the world and reveres the great prophets, teachers, and sons of God, because it recognizes the same divine inspiration in all.

STUDENT'S NOTEBOOK No. 30

For many westerners, running over as they do with enthusiasm and enterprise, karma yoga is recommended as a practical way toward perfection. One will gain knowledge through action—selfless action done as worship, performed as an offering to God. By laboring for the Lord one will come to identify increasingly with him and more and more lose sight of oneself.

That is the idea. But I am not at all sure that karma yoga works. I tried to follow this path for years. What an amount of labor I gave; what numerous, noble projects I carried out! But it all went wrong. When enterprises succeeded I could not avoid taking the credit. When efforts miscarried I felt disgraced. In both cases it was I that remained prominent, not God.

When this became clear I felt I was at the end of the line. Enterprise was a trap; the concept of karma yoga was a fraud. The approach I had

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Félix Martí-Ibáñez, M.D.
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TUKARAM

NANCY POPE MAYORGA

TUKARAM was born in 1598 in a state of India called Maharashtra, a southwest central state which includes Nagpur, Poona, and Bombay. The language is Marathi. A Sudra by caste, a farmer without education, nevertheless, through his love for God, Tukaram became the greatest writer in Marathi. He is famous for his hundreds of *abhangas,* or unbroken hymns, which flow on and on with astonishing facility and exuberant abundance. The divine love that filled his heart overflowed in fervent words. And he took no credit for his songs to himself, for, as he said simply, "I am ordered by God. My words are like the falling of rain."

Marathi is a copious, flexible and beautiful language. It delights in all sorts of jingling formations and playful diminutives. So was Tukaram—full of fun and delight. Troubles and misfortunes he took with humility, with fortitude, and a beautiful saving sense of humor.

"Well done, God!" he says with sturdy relish, looking back on the poor circumstances in which he had been born, the difficulties through which he had had to struggle. "For if I had been born high caste or rich, if I had been comfortable, I might not have had the opportunity to suffer and learn."

Few lives have started out so inauspiciously. Tukaram was a farmer at a time of drought. He was a shopkeeper at a time of depression. He married a young girl who contracted

tuberculosis and died of starvation during a famine. His second wife was a Xanthippe who drove his spiritually-minded friends from the house. His only son died. Poverty, misery, bereavement dogged his every step. "Well done, God!"

From the beginning Tukaram was a good man. But suffering exercised his soul, and it was not long before he was discontented with being just a good man and began to aim at being a god-man. With Plotinus he concluded that "it is not enough to be sinless. We must be nothing less than God." And once he had set sail to the breeze, the irresistible grace of God took him. He received his mantra in a dream from the famous saint Babaji, who was said to have lived three hundred years before. He gave up his futile efforts in the world, and his life became one long striving to raise himself from the human state to the divine.

Tukaram's struggles took on the classic pattern of the mystic way. First, anxious self-examination, even to the point of admitting ruefully that he regarded himself as a great singer. "I think in my mind there is no singer like me. Dispel this illusion, O God." About the world he says, "Let people be as they are. My only business is to bid them good-bye as soon as I see them." About living, he says, "Let me get no food to eat, nor any child to continue my line; but let God have mercy on me."

THE GREAT APPEAL of Tukaram to us is that he is one of us. He presents himself no better than we know ourselves to be. He is frankly afraid: "Accidents befall me and I am afraid." He complains of his restless mind: "Save me from the wanderings of my mind. It is always moving and never rests a moment." He is painfully conscious of his own defects: "I have

been a mine of faults. My idleness knows no bounds. I have assumed a saintly exterior, but have not really bidden good-bye to the things of the world. I have been a thoughtless, crooked, duty-avoiding, censurable wrangler, entirely addicted to sex. I have been a man of dull apprehension. I have entertained false shame."

Well, as we get to know the man, we have to take this self-excoriating with a grain of salt. For always this man of "dull apprehension" is throwing himself and his failings upon the grace of God. "Let my body suffer all kinds of adversities; but let God live in my mind. For God alone is happiness. All my personal endeavor has come to an end. I am only waiting to have Thy grace. I offer my life to Thee as a sacrifice." And "Happy am I that I have determined to find out God!"

Alas! This first fine fervor soon gets bogged down in the dark night of the soul. Not all saints have to pass through the dark night and its sufferings. But Tukaram did. He had a dark night to end all dark nights. Then the personality, the ego of the man comes leaping out at us in loud laments and bitter complaint. How intimate he felt with God is shown by the astounding abuse he heaped upon him, calling him cruel, a liar, and without charity. He flung this odd accusation into the face of God: "I don't believe you exist anyway!" Then in the next breath, a strange plea, "Tell me, O God, the way to find thee, if thou dost exist."

Finally, in despair because he seemed unable to find God, Tukaram came to the extreme point of deciding to end his bodily life. At that very moment of hopelessness, God, who all along had had his child very much in mind, revealed himself. When he had brought Tukaram to his knees, then he raised him up. From that time on, one hardly knows where to begin or where to stop in quoting the endless outbursts of

joy and gratitude. The language soars, yet struggles to express the amount of joy. "Oh God, today's gain is indescribable! Divine joy is seething through my body! Every day to me is now a holy day. We shall sing and dance and clap our hands. I know not night from day, the illumination is ceaseless. How shall I be able to describe the great bliss I enjoy? When I walk, I turn round about thee, when I sleep, I fall prostrate before thee. All houses and palaces have now become the temples of God. Whatever I hear is the name of God."

"We shall sing and dance and clap our hands." Here is the seed of what was to become Tukaram's most characteristic mode of worship—the kirtan—which he calls "that holy confluence of God, the devotee, and his name." "I find," he says, "that God runs to the place where his name is celebrated." He adds, "If a devotee sings lying in his bed, God hears him standing; if he sings sitting, God begins to nod his head with joy; but if he sings standing, God begins to dance."

And if God dances, who can stand on the sidelines? All must lift their arms, all must let his grace put wings to their feet. It actually happens that way when a great soul is caught up in spiritual ecstasy. All the bystanders are drawn in. This was seen whenever Sri Ramakrishna danced. A tremendous spiritual current whirled everyone into the center. They forgot themselves with joy. They laughed and sang and cried. The sacred place of the kirtan was a mansion of merriment. "From joy this universe has sprung, in joy it dwells, unto joy it returns." The poetry is actuality. "Without doubt," says Tukaram, "one can meet God by performing a kirtan. It is a river which flows upward toward God. The gods themselves are unable to describe the happiness produced by it."

In Tukaram's teaching there is nothing new—tell the truth, do not hurt others, be moderate, chant the Name, keep company with the saints. This is all very familiar. Common-

places, perhaps. But the fact is, that a platitude ceases to be trite and dull when it is acted upon. There is nothing new in Tukaram's teaching except the ever-new fact that he lived it absolutely. That is what drew people to him. The flower of purity and devotion opened, the bees came.

"Try it yourself," he pleads sincerely. And assures everyone, "Nothing can stand in the way of a determined effort."

People will come from the corners of the earth to get that particular assurance from a man of God, from within him, from his experience.

Tukaram taught that all life is sacred. "He who helps his fellow being truly worships God." No sinner is past redemption. "Come to me, come to me, great and small, men and women. I shall carry all of you to the other shore." He says very practically, "One should not flutter about, but remain steady, chanting the name of the Lord." He gives this comfort. "God really does come to our rescue. What is needed is patience."

LEGEND has it that Tukaram ascended to heaven in his body. If he did, it seems not so great a miracle as he performed in his life in the face of overwhelming odds. We who have been with him through his struggles and agonies cannot help but rejoice at the calm, unshakeable assurance of his last teachings. "Tell God your sorrow and ask him whatever you want. God will never leave his devotee uncared-for." And again, "I know this—that God will never neglect his saint." Death holds no fear for Tukaram. He sings out triumphantly, "Ring the bell of bhakti! It will send a threat into the heart of death!"

Then finally Tukaram assures us, "The way to God is so bright and straight that nobody need ask any other man

about it." Indeed, Tukaram's life underscores the truth that God is more within the reach of the simple and faithful than of the learned. What can we say finally about this simple and faithful and shining saint, except to echo with satisfaction his own words, "Well done, God!"

I saw my death with my own eyes.
Incomparably glorious was the occasion.
The whole universe was filled with joy.
I became everything and enjoyed everything.
I had hitherto clung to only one place,
  being pent up in egotism in this body.
By my deliverance from it,
  I am enjoying a harvest of bliss.
Death and birth are now no more.
I am free from the littleness of "me" and "mine."
God has given me a place to live
  and I am proclaiming him to the whole world.

—*Tukaram*

A QUESTION-ANSWER SESSION AT A FRANCISCAN SEMINARY

SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA

IN THE *winter of 1964-65 a public lecture series was conducted in Santa Barbara, California, titled "Ferment in Religious Thought." It was sponsored by the Adult Education Center of Santa Barbara City College, in cooperation with the Catholic Human Relations Council. There were four sessions, a week apart, each session lasting about two hours. There was a lecture by some authority in the field, followed by a panel discussion and a question period. The coordinator of the series was an Instructor in Philosophy at Santa Barbara City College, Dr. Timothy Fetler.*

The first session concerned itself with the topic of "Ferment in Modern Catholicism." On this occasion the many questions having to do with Roman Catholic doctrine being considered in the two recent ecumenical councils were discussed. The second session dealt with "Ferment in Modern Protestantism." The fourth meeting was concerned with the controversy raging at the moment in America over prayer and the teaching of religion in public schools, as well as the complex problem of maintaining separation of church and state in the United States.

At the third session, on February 4, Swami Prabhavananda was the main speaker. He spoke on "Ferment in Religions of the World." The lecture was later printed in Vedanta and the West, *Number 173.*

The Swami's lecture was received attentively by an audience of record size. Among those most intently interested was a group of fathers from the Franciscan Seminary situated in Santa Barbara. After the lecture the seminarians held the Swami for some time, asking many questions. When it was realized that Swami Prabhavananda was the translator of some of the very books they were using in their course in oriental religions, and that the Swami spent part of every month in Santa Barbara where the Vedanta Society of Southern California maintains a convent and church, the young fathers were delighted. An invitation to visit the Seminary was extended, and Swami Prabhavananda accepted. The Swami went to the Seminary on the afternoon of March 13, 1965. The very cordial session consisted mostly of a question and answer period, the major portions of which are reproduced below, from a transcription.

Q: Swami, do you feel, in general, that the moral beliefs and practices, the world principles and the needs, of the average Western man—one who is born and grows up in Western society and has no acquaintance with Eastern religions—are similar to those of the Eastern man, say a Hindu?

A: First, I must point out to you that this distinction between "eastern" and "western" religion is a wrong distinction. After all, Christ, in whose name you are devoting your life, was an Easterner. He was born and lived in the East.

And in relation to moral life, or ethical life, or spiritual life, I think that all believe in the same general principles. For instance, you have devoted yourselves to the religious life, and have taken vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. In our religion, also, we take such vows; only our terminology is different. We say that we have to give up cravings for progeny, cravings for wealth, cravings for name and fame

—you see, it amounts to the same thing. We are taught to be truthful; not to hurt any being in thought, word, or deed; not to express greed for another's property; and to overcome lust.

We point out that this whole world really is bound by lust and greed, and that worldliness and God do not go together. Therefore, in order that we can devote ourselves to God and realize God in this life—that's what we emphasize—in order that we can acquire the saintliness which comes when life and character have been transformed by the vision of God—these are the necessary precepts to follow: truthfulness, not hurting any creature, chastity, overcoming greed.

As for obedience; what is meant by obedience after all? To renounce the ego, the little self—"I" as distinct from everybody else. This is the cause of all bondage. We point out that the first-begotten son of ignorance is ego. And from that comes attachment, aversion, and clinging to the surface life. Jesus pointed out: "He who loves this life shall lose it." Clinging to life is something instinctive, through ignorance. But it has to be overcome. How? There is only one way: to devote ourselves to God, to follow the first commandment: "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, with all thy soul, with all thy strength." This commandment is universal. The same in the east or west, north or south.

We all worship one God. In Vedic times, long before any history was recorded, it was stated: "Truth is one; sages call it by various names." And so it is—one God. You call him Christ, I call him Krishna. One man says "Allah," while another says "Brahman." What difference does it make?

This reminds me of a story. Four men were traveling in the desert. One of them said, "Oh, I wish I had a drink of water."

Another said, "I wish I had a drink of *pani*."

A third said, "I wish I had a drink of *jal*."

The fourth, "Oh for a drink of *aqua*."

But the first one said, "What are you three talking about? Pani and jal and aqua cannot satisfy your thirst; only water can!"

Just then somebody came with some water, and all four pointed to it and proclaimed: "That's it! That's it!" And they all took some and drank it.

Q: Could you elaborate a little bit on your understanding of God?

A: Is it possible to have any understanding of God? That's where we get into difficulty! You define God in this way and I define God in that way, and we quarrel. You say, "My God is the only God," and I say, "No, my God is the only God." But what is the truth? I'll tell you what our Master, Sri Ramakrishna, said about God. He said the bee, before it sits on the flower and begins to suck the honey, makes a big, big noise. Then, as it sits on the flower and drinks the honey, it becomes silent. Then again, having drunk the honey and become intoxicated, the bee makes a sweet humming noise. Similarly, those who have no vision of God, who have not gone to the neighborhood of God even, who only have book knowledge—they make a big noise about God: "God can only be defined this way, can only be defined that way." But as one begins to drink that honey, that sweetness which is in God, one becomes silent; and then again, becoming God-intoxicated, one begins to talk about God.

Some say God is personal, some say he's impersonal; some say he's with form, some say he's without form. Some say God is with attributes; some say he is without attributes.

Yet they have drunk of the same ocean of nectar. According to their temperaments, they introduce different ideas when they come to define God. But the truth is, his name is Silence.

I'll tell you a story from our scriptures. A father sent his son away, saying, "Go and study religion." The young boy studied for twelve years, and then came back. His father asked him, "Tell me what you understand of God." The young man gave a wonderful sermon, quoting the scriptures. But the father said, "My boy, go back. You have not yet learned what is to be learned. Go back. Study some more." So the son studied for another twelve years. Then he came home again. And again his father asked, "Now tell me what you have learned of God." But the son kept silent. So the father said, "Why, my son, your face shines like a knower of Brahman. You have known him. His name is Silence."

Q: We feel, though, that God can only be defined as silence in the sense that we cannot completely put down what he is—he's way beyond us.

A: The moment you say, "He is this and that," you are limiting the unlimited, the infinite.

Q: Then how do you explain Christ? In him we see the love, the justice, the mercy—all these aspects.

A: Wonderful! That's right! Christ is like a door through which you gaze into the Infinite, the Absolute.

Q: From this point of view, how do you speak of God as silence?

A: When you *see* Christ, and through that door you reach That (the Absolute), then you become silent. Until you have seen Christ you talk about him, and you say he is this and that. We say Krishna also is this and that. If you were

to take Christ and Krishna and Buddha and Ramakrishna and shut them all in one room, they would embrace each reach That (the Absolute), then you become silent. Until you other. But if you shut a Buddhist, a Catholic, and a Hindu together they'll fight one another. Why? Because none of them has known anything about Christ or Buddha or Krishna or Ramakrishna. When you know, it is different. A dog has the canine instinct for recognizing his master no matter what clothes he is wearing, but we human beings have not even that canine instinct—to recognize that Christ can come in other dress also. It is the same God. (I hope I have not disturbed any of you!)

Q: Swami, one comment—almost accusation—made against Eastern religions is that these religions de-emphasize the individual so much that they want to annihilate him, to dissolve him so he cannot be himself anymore. In other words, I cannot be "me" anymore, in a sense.

A: What is your "me"? Explain it, define it. Is it your body? Your mind? Your senses? Your character? Would you like to be what you are now forever? Aren't you changing? Aren't you losing your "me" all the time? So your real "me" is in the infinite—in God. Find yourself in him; then you have truly found yourself. This idea about individuality—where is it? Define that which is you. Sages and saints—Christians and Hindus and Buddhists—have dedicated years of their lives to finding out, "What am I?" Ultimately they lose themselves in God. Shall I quote to you Meister Eckhart, one of the great Christian mystics? This is what he says: "Most people are so simple that they consider we are here and God is out there. But it is not so. God and I are one." Is that blasphemous? Find that out for yourselves. We are not the "I" or "me" that we think ourselves to be.

Q: Well, how can you speak of transforming yourself then?

A: Transforming yourself? You cannot transform yourself; but by devoting yourself to God, by loving God, you can *be* transformed by him.

Q: Then who is it that seeks the real identity?

A: We have an ego. God has given us an ego, he has given us the little self, in order that we can love him, and in order that ultimately the love, lover, and the Beloved can become one.

Q: I'm still confused. You say we are to seek our true identity in God, and yet I am confused by who this is then that is doing the seeking.

A: For this you have to go to Upanishadic thought. Atman, which we call the true Self, the real Self, the real I, is Brahman: "I and my Father are one." And that Atman is the unchangeable reality within each one of us. But through ignorance from a beginningless time the Atman identifies itself with the sheaths covering it. For instance, the body is a sheath, the mind is a sheath, the life principle is a sheath, and we are identified with them; therefore, the sense of ego. When you analyze what the ego is, you find it has no existence, no reality at all. And yet, such is our ignorance, that we settle our whole world upon the false ego. All the Western mystics point out to you (and they are all at one with Eastern thought) that if you can empty yourself of your "self," there will come the greater unfoldment of God. So this ego that we are holding onto, the individuality that you speak of, is just a shadow.

Here is a parable that we find in our scriptures. Two birds of beautiful golden plumage are sitting on the selfsame

tree. The bird on the upper branch is calm and is in its own glory. The lower bird, hopping from one branch to another, tasting the sweet and bitter fruits, forgetful of the upper bird, continues to enjoy and suffer. When it has eaten a very bitter fruit it looks at the upper bird, and sees how calm and majestic, how glorious that bird is; but again forgets, and goes on eating sweet and bitter fruits, until it has become completely frustrated. Then it gazes at the upper bird, moves nearer and nearer to it, and is gone. All the time the upper bird's shadow was playing; there was all the time just one bird, calm, majestic, in its own glory.

Q: What is it that caused the bird to look up?

A: His true nature. Man's true nature is infinite and divine, and no matter how he may go down and down, ultimately that divinity in him unfolds itself and lifts him up. Therefore, none will be lost. As Christ said, we have to be born in spirit, but we have to bring about the death of the ego. Buddha showed the difference between ignorance and spiritual knowledge. He said we are asleep, and we become awakened. Buddha was asked, "What are you? Are you a god?" He answered, "No." "Are you a man?" "No." "Then what are you?" He said, "I am *Buddha*, the awakened one." And he said that everyone will be awakened.

Q: This unity that we strive for, the unity with God, is accomplished through love. But love demands a separation, and once we arrive at that identity, there's no more love. Right?

A: No! Love wants to become completely absorbed in the Beloved.

Q: But as soon as it is absorbed, it is no longer love.

A: We have a saying in India: "I want to *taste* sugar and not *be* sugar." That is your viewpoint. But learn to taste sugar and then see what happens. This is not human love, but in human love also there is what you can call a fruition, a complete absorption. The Sufi mystics describe it this way. There is a knock at the door. From inside comes the question, "Who is that?" Answer: "I." The door does not open. Again a knock. "Who is that?" "I." No response. For a third time comes the knock. "Who is that?" "Thou." The door opens. Love God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, with all your strength, and then see what happens. I don't have to prove anything to you. You will prove it to yourself.

Q: Is union with God the same in all the Eastern religions?

A: "Union with God" is not exactly correct. The language does not express it. The Vedantic (Hindu) idea is this: you are God, and that God becomes unfolded. There are no two to have union. There is just one. I believe Meister Eckhart, among the Christians, had that kind of experience.

Q: Many of us are not familiar with the Upanishads, the Bhagavad-Gita, or the Vedas. Could you just explain to us what these scriptures are—the general content?

A: Well, I don't know. Suppose I were to say to you, will you explain to me what is in the Bible? That's a very hard task! I'd have to give a series of lectures on the Gita, a series of lectures on the Upanishads. But, generally, these scriptures give the methods and means by which one can realize God.

Let us look briefly at one, the Bhagavad-Gita. According to the Gita there are four ways, called yogas, by which

one can attain God. One is the path of discrimination. That is, through a process of analysis we try to find out what is Real. Now of course in your discrimination you must define the Real as that which is abiding and eternal. Unreal is that which today is, tomorrow is not. And so when you learn to discriminate this way you find that God alone is the Reality. Everything else is unreal. He is the one treasure. You devote yourself to him. This is the path of knowledge, discrimination.

Then there is the path of love or devotion. It is the same as your idea to love God.

Then there is the path of action—work as worship—where every act becomes an act of worship.

Last, there is the path of meditation—psychic control.

All these paths are brought out in the teachings of the Gita. The teacher, Sri Krishna, says that a harmonious combination of all these yogas is best. You see, we have certain natures: emotional, intellectual, active, meditative. So we are told, "Be emotional. Love God. But be discriminative. Also be active. At the same time be contemplative. Combine these yogas." That is what we emphasize—not to be one-sided.

Of course this summary does not do justice to the Gita!

Q: Swami, could you explain to us a little of the doctrine of rebirth or reincarnation?

A: The idea is this. If you consider God as the creator of this universe, you cannot admit the beginning of a creation. To admit the beginning of creation is to admit the beginning of a creator. So this creation is from a beginningless time. Now, for instance, if this is our first birth, and the only chance we have, what a calamity! You may say God has given us freedom, freedom of will to devote ourselves to whichever we choose.

But why did he not give us the will to devote ourselves to God? Why did he create some morally blind? Why did he create so many differences amongst individuals? That God must be a cruel, unjust God. And then if this is the only chance we have, and some go to heaven and the rest go somewhere else—well, God is responsible for that; and who would like to love such a God? Love him through fear? No, we cannot love God that way. In order that we can believe in a just God, we have to believe that he will give us every opportunity, many opportunities, through rebirth or reincarnation, until we wake up. Then all will come to him. So that, in short, is the theory of reincarnation. It is the giving of many chances.

But, you know, Sri Ramakrishna one time was asked, "What do you think about reincarnation?" And he answered, "Yes, they say there is reincarnation. But learn to find God, here and now." That is the practical teaching.

Q: One of the greatest puzzles for us is why the Hindus and the Hindu religion insist so much on respect for cows. Is not the economic system a bit difficult because the cows are respected thoroughly and are not eaten?

A: We don't have any such thing as holy cows. It is your missionaries that go and talk about holy cows! Yes, we see God in everything. In the cows and in the dogs, in the birds and the beasts—everywhere we see the presence of God. But we don't believe in "kneel down and worship mother cow!" I began to hear of that after I came to this country. Some people in India are fanatics, but this is true of any country.

Q: But they don't eat the cow, and therefore they start to—

A: They don't eat the cow. Is that anything so bad? Do we have to eat cows to be spiritual, or civilized?

Q: No, but the economical—

A: Economical! After all, they talk about poverty in India. Yes, there are poor people, true, and you go there and shed tears for the poor people of India. Yes, they are poor, but what has that to do with spiritual life? Do wealth and spiritual life go together? "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." Did not your Master teach that? Don't you take a vow of poverty willingly? So what is wrong with poverty? Of course, I don't want India to be poor. But we were slaves for so many years, centuries, that it is truly a wonderful thing that we have kept up our culture, our spiritual culture, in spite of poverty and slavery. That is something to admire. And what caused England, what caused Portugal, what caused France to go and conquer India? Her poverty, or her wealth? They drained the wealth of our country. So you talk of economy. Yes, we also want to be rich, we want to feed our people; but we are helpless. Do you think if we just kill those cows the people will be satisfied? That is not the way of a sound economy.

Q: Swami, one thing that confronts our missionaries when they go to a country is that the people are really so poor; their only concern is where they can get the next meal, and their spiritual concerns are neglected because of that. Have you seen this a problem in India?

A: No, I would not say so. In spite of her poverty, in spite of her slavery for so many centuries, India has kept her spirituality intact. There is still a living religion of India. I have seen the masses of this country, and I have seen the

masses of India—the poor of India. What great depth of devotion they have for God in India! But that does not mean I want them to remain poor.

Q: Swami, in the Christian religion we make the distinction of natural and supernatural. I was wondering, for example, how would you look upon a couple who loved each other, but let us say they weren't familiar at all with any religion; however, there was love, a true love between this man and woman. Would you call that love exclusively human, or does it in some way participate in divine love? Is there a distinction?

A: All love is divine. But when one loves a man or a woman and does not know that one is loving God in that person—if one is loving the flesh, or the character, or the mind—it is misguided love, no matter how true that love may be, no matter how faithful it may be. That would not lead you to God. But if you can love somebody, with the idea that there is God dwelling in him, and you love God—that would lead you to the highest.

Your distinction between natural and supernatural is true. This is what we call "relative" and "beyond the relative." In the relative there are three states of consciousness: waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep. We live within these three states, but in them we cannot find God. Yet it is within the waking state that we struggle to find God. Then we are lifted above the relative plane to the plane of—I cannot describe it, it is something *beyond*, that's all I can say. Here we live in the relative plane, and it is by transcending this plane that we have the vision of God, or an experience of God. None can see God with the physical eyes, but he who has eyes to see, sees him; he who has ears to hear, hears him —in another plane of consciousness.

Q: Swami, what was your impression when Pope Paul visited India? What did the people feel about his visit?

A: People in India don't care to what faith you belong. They would accept and love and respect anyone who represents any spirituality. The people in India saw in Pope Paul not a Christian, or a Hindu, but a holy man. We embrace all religions; we accept them all as true. This is the example that we give. There is a certain center; the center is God. There are so many radii. As you go along one of these radii you reach the center, and you see that all radii meet there. That is our belief; that is how we are trained from our childhood. This is the prayer that the Hindu learns as a little boy, or a little girl: "As there are different streams coming out from different sources, all mingling in one ocean; similarly, the many religions of the world, coming from different sources, all mingle in that one great ocean of love."

Q: Is there any distinction between persons and classes in India?

A: Of course! Just as you have different classes and persons and castes in America, in Europe, everywhere, so we have different classes and castes in India. We know that in God, in spirit, we are all one; but manifestations differ. There's good, bad; saint, sinner; all kinds of people: ignorant, wise; learned, illiterate. In spirit there is oneness, but in expression there is difference, of course!

Q: Is there any effort to make India classless?

A: If you made America classless, there would be no America. Distinction, difference, variety—that is what makes life interesting; that is what makes the world function. If we all behaved alike, and if our tendencies were all the same

—how awful! Why don't you want differences? Variety is the law of nature. But at the same time, recognize the underlying unity.

Q: I think what Father was talking about was difference of opportunity. We talk about a classless society in the sense of equal opportunity.

A: Oh, yes, in America I know even a pauper is dreaming to be a millionaire, and perhaps he can be a millionaire. So it is in India, everywhere.

Q: But can a lower-class person become a brahmin in that sense?

A: Not a brahmin. He can go beyond brahminhood. I, for instance, was not a brahmin to begin with, yet now brahmins come and bow down to me. So what do you say to that? Right here, an example!

Q: Can you point to any experience in India, Swami, where you feel that the Christian faith has made a creative contact with the Hindu faith?

A: Frankly speaking, as long as I lived in India, I never came in contact with Christians at all. I've seen them, lecturing in the corner of a park. But we never went there, because they would be denouncing the Hindus. That is their way of preaching. You see, such preachers were untouchables to us. I'm sorry to say that, but it is true.

Q: Swami, I'm very impressed with how very close you seem to be to nature, and I just wondered if you could amplify on your outlook toward the world, and just how nature itself fits into your theology, or approach to God.

A: In order to approach God there are two things we

must practice. One is to close our eyes, forget the world—just God and me. But that is not enough. Then we open our eyes and see God dwells in everything.

Q: Well, how about utilizing a response to nature? Say the birds, or the trees, or a beautiful place?

A: Wonderful! I'll give you an illustration of that. I was once on a pilgrimage; I was about twenty years old at the time. There were about a hundred of us, men, women, old and young, traveling in the Himalayas. As we were walking, we saw the sunrise over snow-capped mountains. It was an exquisitely beautiful sight. All these hundred people sighed, "Ah!" Then they sat down and closed their eyes. Can you imagine it? You know what they felt? If this is so beautiful, how much more beautiful would be the source of all that beauty! And where is that source? The Lord within. And so they closed their eyes and tried to commune with God. Yes, nature is beautiful and we love it, but it should remind us only of God.

Q: I thought you said that God is not really the source of all creation.

A. Who else?

Q: Well, you said he could not be a creator.

A: I said if God is regarded as the creator, and if the creation had a beginning, then God had a beginning. And we say God is beginningless, creation is beginningless.

Q: We would say that matter could not be eternal, because then it would be like God.

A: Nature is not eternal, in the sense that nature is always changing. We do not say it is eternal in that way.

Q: Swami, is Hinduism polytheistic?

A: Neither "polytheistic," nor "monotheistic," nor any other of your English words can apply. Forget what you have learned about Hinduism before, please. There is one God. He has many aspects.

Q: How does Hinduism regard good and evil?

A: In creation there is good and evil both. Either you have to take this as a relative creation, or nothing at all. But what is good and what is evil? Can we define it? What is good to you today becomes evil tomorrow. There is no such thing in this relative world as absolute good and absolute evil.

Q: Would a Hindu consider the principle of good and the principle of evil as unequal elements?

A: They are both here in this universe; otherwise, if there were no evil, you would not recognize good.

Q: Will evil be defeated?

A: No, there cannot be a millennium in this world. *You* can defeat evil by rising above good and evil, to God. Goodness is the path to the absolute. But you have to rise above both good and evil. You have to rise above both pleasure and pain, through Christ, to God, the absolute.

Q: What would you say is the basis of Hindu ethics?

A: The basis of Hindu ethics has this one ideal in view: without purity of heart there is no possibility of realizing God. That which would lead you to God is good; that which would take you away from God is evil. For instance, why should I not hurt anybody? Because when I hurt another I hurt myself. I hurt God, for God is within.

Sri Rama Krishna Vivekananda Seva S...
Shivala Mandir Srinagar Kashmir.

Q: But on an abstract level, you might say God is not "hurtable."

A: Yes, that's true. But because I recognize God in you, I would not hurt you.

Q: I'd like to know what you think about the relationship of poetry and religious language.

A: You know, I'm not a poet. But it's wonderful to express God's truth in poetry and poems. In fact, God is said to be a great poet. *Kabi* in Sanskrit means "poet," and God is considered a great poet.

Q: Do you have any comment on the Christian belief that this world comes to an end? Do you believe that?

A: No, I believe it is beginningless and endless. But for you and me—we get out of this mess!

Q: But we come back?

A: Oh, no! If we are devoted to God, and find God, then we do not come back. We have to come back *until* we find him. This creation is infinite and is going on infinitely. That is his play.

Q: What would you say about Christ's statement interpreted as saying the world will end?

A: Did Christ say that?

Q: According to his followers, he did.

A: I'd like to see that—what Christ said. You know, at one time I was in an apartment in Portland, Oregon. And two young ladies knocked at the door. I opened the door and said, "What is it?"

They said, "We are preachers."

I said, "Just a moment. I'm going to hold a class; you come along with me."

So I went and gave a class and they followed me and attended the class. After the class, when I asked for questions, they said, "Do you believe in the Bible?"

I said, "Yes, I do."

They asked, "Every word of it?"

I replied, "Do you believe every word of it?"

"Yes, we do."

I asked then, "Have you read it?"

And they answered, "No."

I said, "That's why you believe in it!"

WHAT VEDANTA MEANS TO ME

LUIS A. JORDAN

I READ Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* in my early twenties. Larry Darrell's search for God and his eventual encounter with him in Travancore held me spellbound. The transformation in his life and the ultimate anonymity he chose—possibly driving a taxicab in New York—filled me with admiration. Larry had found peace of mind and the wisdom necessary to be a king among men even while leading a humble existence.

How different from and yet how similar to my situation! Different, because I was a worldling attracted like a magnet to beauty and power. Sometimes this attraction was so strong that I could have sold my soul to the devil in order to possess both. Similar, because Larry Darrell's story gave expression to vague stirrings in my soul, the yearning for something higher than myself and my environment. Here was a man who had rejected the best of life in order to search for something intangible and elusive, the reality of which can easily be denied and cannot be scientifically proved. It was like Christopher Columbus accepting the challenge of the unknown.

Larry had achieved something that only in my most courageous moments did I dare to acknowledge: the wish to be free from myself. Free from desire, ambition, and passion; from the thousand chains with which the world enslaves a man. It is true that most of the time I loved those chains. But there were moments when I knew that the majority of the world and I were wrong and Larry Darrell

was right. In Larry Darrell I saw the end of Renaissance man—mainly concerned with the sensorial and intellectual world around him—and the beginning of twentieth-century man. We live today in a world dislocated by two world wars, facing the possibility of annihilation in a third war, and confronted by the challenge of space exploration. Before such awesome prospects we cannot fail to ponder upon the deep mystery of our Self and seek for a meaning in life. Death has never been closer. Traditional man seems puny before the great challenges.

We need the strength and wisdom found by Larry Darrell, who fulfills so well Plato's definition: "Man is declared to be that creature who is constantly in search of himself, a creature who at every moment of his existence must examine and scrutinize the conditions of his existence. He is a being in search of meaning."

AT THE TIME I read *The Razor's Edge* I was living in Puerto Rico, my homeland. Travancore seemed very far away indeed. But the years went by and circumstances brought me to the continental United States, first to New York, and then to Chicago. Slowly, through experiences, crises, and sometimes intuitions, the worldling in me began to undergo a process of erosion. And all the time in the back of my mind the example of Travancore continued to beckon to me. A friend of mine—a Spaniard who like myself had been an agnostic and who, while in India during the Second World War—had experienced a transformation in his thinking. He used to talk to me about Vedanta often. It was through him that I first read Romain Rolland's works about Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. My friend also introduced me to Unity and the writings of Emmet Fox. For quite some

time I attended regularly the Unity lectures in Chicago and read Emmet Fox assiduously. His interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, the Ten Commandments, and David's Psalms disclosed for me a panorama of reality unknown to me before. I began to realize that God was not an illusion and that he could be reached by human contact.

I also read some of Yogi Ramacharaka's books. It was while reading his *Jnana Yoga* that I first had an inkling that the Atman and the Supreme Reality are one and the same. I remember very distinctly that occasion. It was a very cold winter night in Chicago and the radiator in my room was shaking noisily with the steam. While reading the book I was suddenly overwhelmed by the realization that the power which produces heat, moves a locomotive, and explodes an atomic bomb is the same power which throbs in my veins and which gives me life. A thick snow was falling the following morning and the ground looked like a white blanket. I walked a few blocks to my job. I still remember how joyfully I welcomed the snowflakes falling over my face and overcoat. This feeling of exaltation was short-lived but unforgettable.

One day my friend said, "Vedanta must have a center in Chicago. Let's find out." He opened a telephone directory and dialed a number. A conversation ensued. At the other end of the wire I could hear the muffled sound of a very hearty voice. After ringing off, my friend said, "That was the Swami-in-Charge. He invited us to attend his lecture next Sunday. He is a swami from India, from the Ramakrishna Order, the same organization I used to visit while I was in the Army."

The following Sunday we went to the service. That first day, as soon as the Swami began his powerful invocation in Sanskrit, a wave of emotion engulfed me. I knew then that there was no need for me to go to India.

TODAY, a dozen years later, I am a householder with a wife and three children. The search has ended, but by far the most difficult task remains, which is to continue the ascent of the mountain where, at its summit, lies the prize of peace of mind and wisdom found by Larry Darrell.

Throughout all the years that I have been attending lectures and meditation classes and enjoying the guidance of the Swami and the company of other devotees, Vedanta has come to mean much to me.

First of all, Vedanta has brought about a revolution in my thinking, produced a radical change in my attitude toward the world, and taught me to accept life on its own terms and how to improve on it. In short, Vedanta has unveiled for me a new and better way of life.

Vedanta has shown me that life can be fun. It introduced me to the concept of God's *lila,* which to say the least is a very original way of looking at life. It taught me that adventure is not by any means limited to physical exploits. That romance doesn't necessarily involve human love or brave deeds. That the universe is not only worlds and constellations; there is within each one of us a spiritual universe bigger and mightier than the one without.

Vedanta has shown me that the path of spiritual life is rich in excitement but plagued by adversity. That it has moments of fierce battle and long hours of tedium; of grave dangers and unsuspected invulnerabilities; moments of anguish and of bliss. That it is a road demanding courage, patience, persistence, and a will of iron from those who hope to reach the goal. In this adventure one has to engage in mortal combat with the most formidable opponent that man has ever faced; his own self. And one has to wage his crucial battles in the arena of his own soul. The prize of victory is cosmic love.

Vedanta has taught me to love the storm and admire the strength of the tiger; to see in evil the potentiality of good; and above all, to revere life as the most priceless gift that God has given us.

It provided me with the opportunity to read many of Swami Vivekananda's books, which form a spiritual powerhouse.

Vedanta introduced me to the Bhagavad-Gita with its message of altruism. If selfishness could be wiped out from man's consciousness, the misery of the world would disappear overnight. The Gita tells just how this can be accomplished. If *The Prince* of Machiavelli explains how to achieve, consolidate, and preserve political power, the Gita teaches how to attain eternal power.

Vedanta matured my religious thinking on the subject of divine retribution, by explaining philosophically the truth in Lord Byron's stanza:

> The thorns which I have reaped are of the tree
> I planted,—they have torn me,—and I bleed:
> I should have known what fruit would spring
> from such a seed.

Vedanta disclosed for me the purpose of life, which is that we are born not to be happy but to grow spiritually. And that both joy and sorrow seem to be necessary for this growth.

Vedanta has opened for me a boundless universe, the beauty of which surpasses the majesty of nature, the loveliness of woman, the greatness of the hero. It is the world of wonder. How do we go about unlocking its secret? Vedanta shows that this world surrenders its glory and splendor only to the spirited adventurer who dares to sail across the turbulent waters of self-discovery. It is a voyage into the deep and

mysterious ocean of the spirit of man, and its destination is an uncharted island of incomparable beauty. This ocean is fraught with perils and hardships. The seafarer can lose his way and the rage of the waters can smash and sink his ship. But the captain has with him an invaluable guide and friend who directs him at all times. This trustworthy friend provides the genius of orientation, so important in the vastness of the sea. The compass is this guide.

In the language of symbols, one could say that the ship is the mortal body of the aspirant; the captain the will of man; the ocean is his soul; the crew is the captain's thoughts which alternately work for and against him, but which can always be at a strong captain's command. The compass is the guru. The uncharted island is God.

Many times the trip seems to be a hopeless undertaking doomed to failure. It is marked by long hours of despair and appalling loneliness. Only the captain's courage and determination can finally bring the vessel to the safety of the port. When this land is reached one could say with Browning:

> Are there not . . ., dear Michal,
> Two points in the adventure of the diver,
> One—when, a beggar, he prepares to plunge,
> One—when, a prince, he rises with his pearl?

SUMMING up, Vedanta presents a challenge, makes a promise, and points a way. It presents the challenge of self-conquest; promises the uncharted island (or the pearl); and points the way in the general direction of discovery. Then it says: "The discovery is up to you and your compass. Remember that you are the captain of the ship."

All this and more Vedanta means to me.

WHAT DO WE NEED?

SWAMI GNANESWARANANDA

THERE are three things, fundamentally, that differentiate humans from animals: ambition, initiative, and aspiration.

If we consider biological needs, such as eating, drinking, sleeping, fighting, multiplication of species, and so on, we find very little distinction between the human and animal species. Man is fundamentally an animal; but there are certain distinctive features which differentiate the human kind from the animal. We are told that animals work because they are goaded on from within by a kind of instinct. The urge of hunger sends them out into the world of action and expression. And the fundamental need of protecting themselves against their enemies urges them to fight.

MAN might not be very different from animals in many respects, but he is supreme in one thing: he is endowed with something which makes him man. That something is ambition. Now, exactly what is ambition? To put it briefly, ambition is the urge to gain something. But such a vague statement will not satisfy us. What *is* that something? It is something which we feel we do not now possess. Herein lies the distinction of man. He is able to find out, with reason, what he wants. In other words, he is capable of being ambitious. He sets before himself an ideal and convinces himself of his ability to achieve it.

Therein lies the need of man for the faculty for thinking. Man is a thinking animal. Other animals do not have to think, to any great extent at least, because they do not have ambition. Therefore man, in order to be man, must want to achieve something—the definite ideal of which he must determine with the help of his reasoning faculty. Consequently, the first item man requires is the cultivation of his faculty of thinking.

Let us take it for granted that all of us have ambition to achieve something in this world. Some people may say that their ambition is to have better living conditions. But how many have reached a definite conclusion even with regard to that ideal? Almost like animals, we intuitively accept conditions from our environment or our tradition as the standard of better living conditions for ourselves, without thinking very deeply about the matter. That cannot rationally be considered as ambition at all. That is just a habit of thinking. I would say that ambition means the gradual formation of an active inner urge to gain something worthwhile.

Now what is that worthwhile something which we must all gain in this life? Human life is a great opportunity. It gives us a chance to achieve the highest goal that any being can attain. And that goal, the ambition to achieve that goal, can only be gained by exercising our faculty for thinking. Man must think it out, understand the process of thinking, and consider the value of the ways and means at his command. All these items I include under the expression: the faculty for thinking.

Today we find a lack of this fundamental faculty of thinking, especially here in the West where life has been made so easy, so comfortable. When life is speeding headlong, towards what we know not, we have very little time to think. Our advantages have stunted the growth of our faculty

for problem-solving. Nowadays if you want to get in touch with someone you reach for the telephone, and almost immediately you are speaking to that person. There is no need for thinking out ways and means for reaching him. An efficient process, no doubt; but this advantage has robbed us of something. If you did not have that telephone handy, you would have been forced to do some thinking. It is not the action of doing that is so important; it is the exercise of our faculty for thinking. That has deteriorated by our having too many advantages. If your child has a cold, you pick up the phone, call the doctor or the druggist, and say, "Oh, Johnny has a cold! What shall I do?" Then someone else will do all the thinking for you. Or perhaps you have an argument with a neighbor. You go to the telephone and consult your friends: "What would you do in such a case? Tell me, what do you suggest I should do?" You have your friends think it out for you. In every aspect of life you will find that the advantages we are enjoying today, this almost instant co-operation from our friends and neighbors, have undermined our faculty for thinking. In commercial life, in the field of selling, you find that much money is spent to tell you how good an item is. Everything is placed before us in this way. In our business and social life, even in our religious life, everything is ready-made. There is not time for thinking, for we are speeding ahead at a great pace! So abundant are our conveniences that the most essential parts of our lives are presented to us in the same standardized way. If there were more difficulties, we might be given the opportunity for determined thinking of the pros and cons of things. Life then might not be easy, but it would develop our faculty for thinking.

Shall we then go back to primitive life, you ask? No. But why should we not harmonize the two sides? What

harm is there in using all the advantages of modern life *for the attainment of a higher life?* Modern civilization has put much more time at our disposal, has saved us a lot of energy and drudgery, but are we using the time saved to the best advantage?

What we need fundamentally is the ability to think. But do we know how to think? Do the questions of "Who am I? Why am I here? Where did I come from? Where am I going?" bother us at all? Do we ever seriously consider them? If we question ourselves and try to find the answers to these queries we will sharpen our faculty for thinking, and that power will be helpful to us in every aspect of our lives.

Those who do not think just follow the crowd. Of course, they may be successful to a certain extent. And no doubt there are many people who do give serious thought to the deeper problems of life. But in general we need to be more thoughtful regarding all our problems.

We should also consider the obstacles and dangers involved in proceeding blindly. In a civilization of such great advantages there seems to be a childish optimism; we rarely think seriously that there might be many obstacles to overcome. We are rushing headlong. We do not go deeply behind, to work out the solutions to vital questions which, one day, we shall have to face. We spend our lives dodging the issues. We just follow the crowd. We must have a definite goal to achieve in this life; and that can only be arrived at by a good deal of thinking and experimentation.

THE second requisite, or distinct feature of man, is initiative. Ambition without initiative is of little value. You may sit in your armchair with a great ambition to travel around the world, but if you have no initiative your ambition will never

bear fruit. Your energy will be frittered away in daydreams of exotic lands far away. First, we should have a clear-cut idea of what we want to achieve, of what our ambition is; and next we need initiative.

Do we realize what is meant by this expression, initiative? We may vaguely think that it means some kind of activity or the ability to do something in an energetic way. My definition of initiative is: That which flows through your actions, after you have filled yourself up with a thorough comprehension of your ideal. Initiative translates your ambition into action.

In considering initiative, we find two extreme types of people, the underactive and the overactive. The underactive type is lacking in the initiative of translating his ideal into action. Such people think that if someone else would do the favor of getting for them what they want, it would be fine. They may be filled with an ideal, but their lives become a sad contradiction. Their tendencies and their ideals are contending with each other. This shows a lack of the expenditure of energy. This type should be goaded to action.

But one should take action commensurate with the status he has reached. Suppose a man has the ambition to achieve the greatest attainment in life—spiritual realization. Say he is a beginner, yet he thinks he should be doing nothing but meditating. You will find that he will make many mistakes, and he will make it difficult for others who have to come in contact with him. Therein lies his lack. If that person suspends his highest ambition for the time being; if he takes the next step forward to discipline himself to be more active, to assert his initiative, he will reach his goal much sooner than otherwise.

Once a young man came to my teacher, seeking spiritual instruction. It was in Benares.

"How long have you been here, and what have you been doing?" asked my teacher.

"I have been here three or four months," answered the boy. "I am trying to find a holy man to teach me."

My teacher said, "Is that *all* you have been doing?"

The boy thought this an odd question and he looked puzzled.

My teacher said, "I will ask you to do something. Will you do it?"

The boy replied eagerly that he would.

Then my teacher explained: "When I was taking my bath in the Ganges this morning I found that the steps of the river ghat were covered with slippery moss. It is dangerous for people. Someone might slip and have a bad fall. Will you scrub those steps for the good of all who go there for their baths? That will lead you towards the realization of your highest goal."

The boy did not give any reply. He seemed disappointed and went on his way.

That young man was wasting his time. It is essential that we learn the discipline that will translate our ambition into action. We must have initiative. It is not the quantity of work that is done that brings one to the realization of his ambition. Initiative presupposes a skill in expanding your energy with a good deal of consideration, so that you do not expend too much or too little. That, to my mind, is the real meaning of the word "initiative."

One who rushes ahead into action does not necessarily have initiative, either. That type will achieve nothing. He wastes his energy, fritters it away in a chain of endless actions, without assessing what is needed for him to reach his goal. Right initiative is not wrong expenditure of energy. Our energy is meant for the achievement of something defi-

nite. We need to give a good deal of thought to that also. In the West, there is quite a lot of wrong expenditure of energy. We might be exercising our muscles or our vocal organs for hours and hours, but at the end, when we take stock of ourselves, we find that nothing has been achieved. It is because of wrong expenditure of energy.

THE third quality which distinguishes man from the animals is aspiration. I mentioned these three: ambition, initiative, and aspiration. Man is so constituted that he cannot remain satisfied with anything that is in the finite, anything which has an end. Suppose you have the ambition to make money, and you set a limit of a million dollars. You then exercise your initiative and you find out ways and means to earn this money. You expend your energy towards that goal, and you are successful. Will you be satisfied with your million dollars? Certainly not. The same may be said of everything in the realm of the finite. That which has the qualification of finiteness cannot satisfy the ambition of man. That is because we are made of the stuff of the Infinite. The Infinite is our nature. Anything that has a limit cannot satisfy the inner being; it is inadequate, and the inner being rises and protests against it. But because of our lack of thinking we come to a deadlock and gradually stagnation sets in.

Aspiration may be described as thoughtfully knowing what we have and looking forward to something else finer to achieve. The gross can lead us only so far. When we have achieved some amount of success in the material world we can go deeper into the psychological, the intellectual, and the spiritual aspects of our being. We should create higher aspirations as we proceed. Man looks forward. If it is pointed out to man that there is a great realm within himself, and

if his understanding is drawn towards that and he is shown the ways and means to reach this realm, he will be able to go forward. There is no place to stop until we have reached perfection within.

If one does not have aspiration, if he denies the protests of his inner being against finiteness, he reaches a stage of stagnation. And if life is stagnant, degeneration sets in. Along with ambition and initiative there must be aspiration.

It is self-satisfaction that causes stagnation in our lives. This point has been illustrated in a story told by Sri Ramakrishna. There was once a poor man, a very, very poor man, who made his living by cutting wood in the forest. He would cut logs and carry them on his shoulders and go to a market-place, or bazaar, and sell them. The man had to walk many miles to gather the logs and he could not carry many; thus he could earn very little each day. One day—it was a sultry summer afternoon—the woodcutter became tired; so he sat down to rest under a tree. He was thinking of his unfortunate circumstances when a holy man appeared. They talked together. The poor woodcutter told the holy man how he did not have enough to eat or wear, and how his family was suffering, almost starving. He asked if the holy man could help him. The holy man thought for a moment and said, "Go farther ahead." And then he got up and went on his way.

(I am glad that the holy man did not give the woodcutter a bag of gold, which is probably what you are thinking would have done the poor man much more good than advice. But the holy man knew better. So he said, "Go farther ahead.")

The woodcutter pondered over the words of the holy man. He began to think: "What could he have meant?" The next day the woodcutter was going as usual to cut

wood when he wondered, "I have been cutting wood in this part of the forest for a long time. What is beyond? Should I go farther in? Perhaps that is what the holy man meant."

So he began to penetrate the deep forest. After great difficulty the woodcutter found himself in a forest of sandalwood. He was very happy. He was able to make more money by cutting just a small part of what he had formerly carried to market. Sandalwood brought a good price. His burden was lighter; he had more money, and his wife and children were better taken care of than before. He did not tell anyone about how or where he found his new riches. He progressed in his new business of selling sandalwood and he and his family were contented.

But one day the woodcutter was thinking of the holy man he had met in the forest, and of his advice, "Go farther ahead." The woodcutter thought, "The holy man didn't tell me to go to the forest of sandalwood. He said, 'Go farther ahead.'" So the next day, he went deeper into the forest. On and on he went and he found a copper mine. He became richer than before, much richer. But he remembered the words of the holy man. So he continued going deeper and deeper, and on and on, and he found a silver mine, then a gold mine, and finally a diamond mine!

This little story conveys a deep philosophy. Analyze it and you will find that the one thing which brought the man to his goal was his aspiration to go farther ahead. Too often we think that if we have progressed to some extent, why bother to do any more? The fact is, we lack the aspiration to attain anything worthwhile. And then we slip into the stage of stagnation, which is the beginning of degeneration.

Determination—aspiration—that is what we must have.

Our ambition must be well-planned and reinforced by

serious thinking. First of all, let us learn to do our own thinking. What if there are a few problems? Life would not be worth living without a few problems! And let us learn to solve our problems, not to depend upon others. You will find that there is an enjoyment, a sort of satisfaction, in solving your own problems.

I WOULD like to bring to your notice one or two more points. We find that because of our lack of thinking we cannot stick to anything. Modern life has become too inconsistent. There is no security in anything. Your money is not secure; your marriage is not secure; nothing is secure. All of this results from poor thinking. Each step in life should be taken with the consideration it demands. Our plans may have been all right, but the ambition was absent or the aspiration lacking. That is why things are so unsteady today. We should develop the faculty for thinking before we enter into activity. And then, a good deal of tenacity is needed. People come to conclusions too quickly and then change their minds without real reason. Or they find themselves unable to make up their minds about even the most commonplace things. Because of our lack of thinking we have no constancy, no tenacity. We are swayed by the thinking of other people, whether good or bad.

Sri Ramakrishna told a story which illustrates this state of affairs. A man decided that he must have a well on his property. He decided upon a spot and started to dig. His nextdoor neighbor saw him digging, and as he had nothing much to do he went over to watch him. (You always find that people like to watch others work!) After some time the neighbor said, "Oh, is *that* where you are digging your well? You'll never find water there. Why don't you try over here?" And he pointed to a spot a little distant from where the man

was digging. The man thought that perhaps his neighbor was right; so he left the spot he had begun and started digging where the neighbor had indicated. Later, another neighbor joined them. He told the man that it was much more likely that he would find water several feet from where he was then digging. The man had already dug many feet into the ground; but upon hearing the new advice he scratched his head, heaved a sigh, and started digging where the second neighbor had suggested. And so it went on. Many came to give advice and the man followed it all. He never found any water. If he had stuck to the place he had first decided upon, without listening to all the advice from his friends, he would have had his well.

I do not mean to say that we should not take advice and we cannot profit by the experience of others; but we must have a background of our own experience for advice to be of any benefit to us. Before you set to work to achieve anything you must consider all the angles involved. And then you must have real bulldog tenacity. That is not all. Your plan has to be overhauled once in a while, according to the demands of your environment. It has to be revised at every step, according to experience you have gained.

Another illustration, which is also a story told by Sri Ramakrishna, comes to mind. A farmer wanted to irrigate his farm, so he had conduits made to bring the water to all parts of his farm. He had to draw water from his well and then direct it into the channels, which carried it to the different parts of his land. He worked hard all day long. When the day was over he went over the land to see that all parts had been irrigated. To his amazement he found that one of the most important sections had not been watered at all, because of a leak in one of the conduits. The water had flowed out into a ditch instead of entering that plot of land. The farmer

had not inspected the channels beforehand through which the water was to reach the land. He had not set his mind to all the details. Somebody formulated some idea and he followed. He didn't think the matter out for himself.

Another thing. It is not mere intellectual tenacity that is necessary. It is the ability to adapt yourself according to the exigencies of the occasion. This man in our story had the ambition and the initiative, but he had not taken into consideration all the details regarding the scheme. He did not find out the flaw in the arrangements. And I might mention here that when we do try to find out flaws, obstructions, and difficulties in what we are doing we always find them *around* us; never *here,* within our own selves. If we find a mistake or a flaw in our activities, let us look for the cause of it *here,* within. We always think it is someone else's fault. The trouble is that we lack self-analysis. For that reason, although we expend our energy, we often get little or no results.

Let me appeal to you that what we need, fundamentally, is to develop our power of thinking. It is calm, thoughtful, and deep consideration of life that is necessary. We are not just biological animals; we have finer faculties within us. Civilization does not extend outward. It is not by the cultivation of outside nature that we attain progress. Real progress lies in going deeper within one's self. Let us start the cultivation, the discipline, there—within. Then, like the woodcutter, going through the different stages of material prosperity, we shall be able to attain the only worthwhile ambition in life, which is the realization of the Perfection within.

THE PALE SWEETHEART

FELIX MARTI-IBAÑEZ, M. D.

LIKE every physician, and even more often because I have roamed around the world several times, I have frequently come face to face with the drama of Death, that pale sweetheart. I have seen men dying and I have seen men dead. Although death is certainly no stranger to me, it has never ceased to be grievous and disquieting.

I have known no greater stoicism at the imminence of death than that shown by my former teacher Gregorio Marañón, the learned endocrinologist, writer, and humanist, who in 1958 in Madrid suffered a cerebral hemorrhage from which he fortunately recovered. Months later, feeling ill again, Marañón consulted his famous colleague Dr. Rof Carballo. "Do you think," inquired Marañón, "that my illness is about to reach the—transcendent solution?" And again some time afterward, in reply to another colleague who sought to comfort him regarding his ailment, he said: "No, my friend, I know exactly what is the matter with me and its prognosis. If you'll look in my own *Manual of Etiological Diagnosis* [a monumental textbook of more than a thousand pages that he had written, possibly the most important treatise in the history of etiologic medicine] you will find my exact ailment described by myself, on page such-and-such." And, unfortunately, his self-prognosis was correct.

Another fine example of a noble, stoic attitude before

dying is to be found in the last letters that Dr. Edward Wilson, physician, naturalist, artist, and Antarctic explorer, wrote to his wife from the icy wastes of the South Pole. The men in Scott's ill-fated expedition, of which Dr. Wilson was a member, had met death from starvation and cold. When discovered months later, their emaciated bodies were sheathed in a permanent, thick crust of ice. Dr. Wilson's letters were found near his body. "Don't be unhappy," he wrote his wife, "all is for the best. We are playing a good part in a great scheme arranged by God himself, and all is well. . . . We will all meet after death, and death has no terrors. . . . I leave this life in absolute faith and happy belief. . . . All is for the best to those that love God. . . . All is well."

TODAY we know a great deal and at the same time very little about death. Lipschütz called death the last phase in individual growth; for Verworn it was the irreversible cessation of the nutritional processes. Tange considered death as a general property of living organisms; Sedgwick Minot, as an accidental characteristic produced by the differentiation of living matter in the course of phylogenesis. In his time, the biologist August Weismann maintained that unicellular organisms, such as protozoa and bacteria, are essentially immortal, that their death not only is an accident caused by ecologic variations, but also is absolutely unnecessary, since any organism that reproduces itself by fission or gemmation is in essence "immortal."

From this it may be understood that death ceases to be an accidental phenomenon and becomes inevitable with the development of sexual reproduction. In higher organisms, including man, we must differentiate between somatic cells,

which are perishable, and reproductive cells, which perish only by accident but are intrinsically immortal. The soma is perishable; the germ cell is immortal.

Owing to the perennial nature of the germ cells, man is perpetuated in his descendants and is himself a living fragment of his ancestors. The death of millions of spermatozoa and ova is purely accidental; the fact that only a few of these cells are allowed to survive guarantees to a certain extent the survival of the species and the continuity of the germ cell.

There is a general and an elemental death: in the first, the individual as a co-ordinated unit of a superior order is destroyed; in the second, the nutritional processes of the cells that constitute the whole of the organism are halted. Every day a large number of our epithelial cells, erythrocytes, and other cells of the body perish and are replaced by newly formed cells. But the life of the whole organism is preserved by the continuation of the metabolic process, as revealed by the regenerative capacity of the germinal cells and by the persistence of nutritive changes in those muscle and nerve cells that have lost their regenerative capacity.

Every living creature—of the higher animals at least—bears within it the seed of death. There exists in almost every living thing a thanatic impulse that is translated by the organism into a tendency toward biologic stabilization. Individual death assures the renewal and progress of existence, thereby entailing and symbolizing a paradoxically creative tendency.

IN THE history of medicine, many great physicians after Hippocrates concerned themselves with the phenomenon of death. Bichat, for example, established a vital tripod com-

posed of the heart, lungs, and brain, which succumb one after the other in a particular order, and he described as signs of death the clouding of consciousness, delirium, dyspnea, the death rattle, the Hippocratic facies (the pinched, livid face), arrhythmia (abnormal heart rhythm), bradycardia (slow heart beat), and hypothermia (subnormal body temperature).

Contrary to popular opinion, death to all appearances (apart from exceptional cases or accidents) is not accompanied by physical pain; rather, it is suffused with serenity and even with a certain well-being and spiritual exaltation, a premortal euphoria that has no religious or philosophic origin but is caused by the anesthetic action of carbon dioxide on the central nervous system and by the effect of toxic substances. "The pang of death," wrote Ernest Hemingway, "a famous doctor once told me, is often less than that of a toothache." There is no physical pain, properly called, but there may be a feeling of anguish, a certain premortal psychosis comparable more or less to a symptomatic toxic psychosis.

Of enormous interest are the studies of A. W. Kneucker, who for nineteen years studied the process of senile death, death through conditions incompatible with life (asphyxia, submersion, severe diabetes), and death from other causes, observing that death is forged in the neurovegetative system, adrenal glands, heart, and blood. Two substances of lethal effect are the acetylcholine liberated by endogenous or exogenous stimulation of the vagus nerve, which paves the way for the lethal action of potassium on the heart, and serotonin, which liberates histamine and adrenaline.

From Kneucker's viewpoint, death is the irreparable disruption of the equilibrium among hormones, enzymes, and ions. In two thirds of all cases death would occur through

an excess of acetylcholine, potassium, and serotonin, and a deficiency of hydrocortisone, cholinesterase, magnesium, and adrenaline, but death would not be a fatality against which the physician is powerless, since he could fight it or delay it through the use of hormones, enzymes, and ions.

PHILOSOPHICALLY, death is an enigma, even for physicians who witness it so often. When blood—the symbol of life!—flows freely in a fatal accident, glowing like rubies in the sun, or when life escapes naturally from the body like a bird from a cage, there remains only an inert mass of purely organic matter with nothing concealed within it.

But death is the essential human vocation. Man's physiologic race is only a race toward its ultimate culmination, which is death, a logical obverse of the medal of life. Diseases themselves are but pathophysiologic accidents in that great process toward death which begins to unfurl in time as soon as we are born.

Death is less frightening when we concede that life attains maximum fullness only when it is guided by an ideal, by something for which we are willing to die if necessary. That is why the lives of heroes, mystics, and martyrs have much more meaning and are more intense than the life of an ordinary mortal. That is also why the willing martyr is to be envied. In a way, the physician Michael Servetus, discoverer of the pulmonary circulation, was a willing martyr, for he went to Geneva even though he knew that the implacable Calvin was waiting for him. Accused of doctrinal heresy, Servetus was put to a horrible, slow death on a green wood pyre.

Whatever incites us to die also incites us to live with greater intensity. That is why life is lived and why love and

the pleasures of the senses are felt with more intensity by people who are facing death in a war or revolution. The memoirs of those condemned to the guillotine by Robespierre and his colleagues during the Terror of the French Revolution are highly enlightening in this respect. I, myself, remember that, during the years of menace and death of the Spanish Civil War, for those of us who were living in the expectation of dying at any moment everything acquired a sublime and unexpected value: a day of sunshine, the clasp of a hand, a glass of wine, a pretty face, a bird, a rose. But even as a coin attains its full value when it is spent, life attains its supreme value when one knows how to forfeit it with grace when the time comes. Good bullfighters give us a fine example of how to die, when the time comes, with grace and *garbo*.

Death is an essential attribute of life, and life should never become a hospital or a clinic in which we dare not live for fear of death. The essential thing is to know how to live. People who prefer the safety of a retired life to the dangers of an active one do not know how to live; indeed, they are not living, they are half dead. On the other hand, the man who loves life as much as he does not fear death lives a fuller and better life because he has killed death. Of course, life can be prolonged by not using it, just as money will last longer if it is not spent, but such a soporific extension is obtained only by sacrificing all intensity in living, thereby turning life into a *vita minima*, into mere hibernation.

The physiologist Ehrenberg stated that it is impossible to define life without death. Up to its very last link, life is a biochemical chain reaction. Once life is launched, like a bullet it must reach its final destination, which is death. We live and un-live life simultaneously, since the phenomenon of dying is engendered as soon as we are born, it being im-

possible to change the inexorable course of life, except perhaps to slow it down. However, a life with a slow rhythm lasts no longer than a life with a fast rhythm. But both slow and fast lives may include the same content, just as a film includes the same number of frames, whether it is projected at a low or high speed.

Emotions and thought are accelerators of life's chemistry. They are, in the words of Baltasar Gracián, "life's postilions who add their stimulating haste to the normal march of time." The noble emotion of heroism is a voluntary anticipation of death. But if we seek to profit from life, we ought to profit also from death. Instead of trying to avoid the involuntary "chemical" death of a plant or animal, we ought to command death. That is what medieval knights did, inspired by the warrior spirit of the Middle Ages. But with the advent of the industrial revolution, the horror of death mounted, and chemical, medical, and mechanical techniques were invented to fight it and to allow us a voluntary choice of death.

Today we know that fear of death is a necessary concomitant of our existence, but we must not allow it to influence that existence. Of course, every human being comes to know at one time or another what William Dunbar meant when he said, "*Timor mortis conturbat me*" (" The fear of death disturbs me"). Sir Thomas Browne himself said: "The long habit of Living makes meer Men more hardly to part with life, . . ."

WHAT ARE the roots of the fear of death? First of all, it is the fear of pain and the feeling of anguish that is implicit in dying; second, the sadness of leaving our loved ones and everything—work, joy—that binds us to the world; and

third, and perhaps the most important, fear of the unknown.

But the testimony of those who have been at the point of death and have returned to life and everything known to medicine about the death process seem to show, as I said before, that the moribund usually undergo no great physical suffering and that the sensation of dying is like that of falling asleep. Muscular convulsions can be seen, but these are probably automatic and caused by the lack of oxygen, which in turn engenders a merciful anesthesia. Moreover, if a person accepts his death as an act of service to an ideal or as the end of his life's work, the feeling of dying may be no more unpleasant than that of falling asleep. Eternal rest could be a blessing and could be accepted more willingly if we knew that we had at all times fulfilled our duty in life.

Furthermore, abandoning our worldly goods and our loved ones would be less distressing if we knew we were leaving behind a legacy of love, creation, goodness, justice, and ideals. This legacy would allow us to humanize death by endowing it with liberality, generosity, and graciousness. "Let us be poets of our existence," said Ortega y Gasset, "by knowing how to find for life the exact rhyme of an inspired death."

But the great fear that death inspires—so perfectly and beautifully analyzed by the eminent Spanish clinician Dr. Roberto Nóvoa Santos—is fear of the unknown, similar to the childhood fear of darkness of which Lucretius spoke. Religion and philosophies have tried in vain to dissipate this fear, as did Plato in his *Phaedo,* Shakespeare in *Hamlet,* Sir Thomas Browne, and St. Paul ("O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?").

This fear is not so much of dying as of what comes after death. Does our protoplasm dissolve into its primordial elements and return to the universe, or does the complex system

of images that we call consciousness survive? Even if we knew that there would be no pain in dying, that instead we would feel a premortal "psychosis," a euphoria of death that would fill us with a sense of well-being and ecstasy, even if we knew that, while the body is reacting in death with automatic reflex movements, the spirit is free and pure and feels no pain or anguish, the mystery of the Beyond would still terrify us. To fight that fear we should remember Maurice Maeterlinck's words: "Once the doctor and the sick man have learnt what they have to learn, there will be no physical nor metaphysical reason why the advent of death should not be as salutary as that of sleep." Death ought to be a rest after a tiring journey, as Hesiod hinted when he said, "Night, having Sleep, the brother of Death." It could also be, as Leopardi said, ". . . *quel dolce naufragare in questo mare!*" (". . . how sweet to be shipwrecked on that sea!")

It might help to dissipate our fear of the unknown if we remember that, were we endowed with consciousness before birth, we would probably feel the same fear of the unknown when passing from the shadow world of the womb, all peace, silence, and darkness, into the light world of life, all noise, commotion, and cold. We should know how to leap into the unknown world of death just as we do into life at birth, particularly since when we die we have the advantage of having lived, of having cultivated life, of having a treasury of memories, of tasks completed, of tenderness and affection, of possibly possessing a Stoic philosophy, as did Seneca or Marcus Aurelius, of having fulfilled a duty with love and generosity. We cultivate the will to live, but unfortunately we do not try to cultivate the will to die. We desire death only in moments of utter desperation or intense happiness, as is the case with martyrs and lovers.

Were we to deem death a physiologic necessity like hunger or thirst, we would aspire to die, as Nietzsche said. ". . . like a torch . . . which dies exhausted and glutted with itself." But this philosophy has not occurred even to medical philosophers. The great Élie Metchnikoff, who studied old age so extensively, was obsessed with the fear of death and saw dangers to his life everywhere, even to the point that on his dining table he kept a lighted gas burner on which he sterilized every morsel of meat he ate. This same distress about the afterlife also harassed the final years of Ramón y Cajal, an optimist in his writings although not in his tormented intimate life. "Death seems unbearable to us," said Élie Metchnikoff, "because it occurs at a moment when man has not completed his physiological evolution and is in full possession of his instinct for life."

SUCH ATTITUDES could be combated by learning how not to die "too soon," before one has done everything one wants to accomplish, by learning how "to die when the time comes." In the Orient, there are millions of people whose philosophy and religion have taught them how "to die when the time comes," people who have the will to die or who, as in the nirvana of the Buddhists, try to reach a deathlike state during life. Thus they love life, just as when the time comes they know how to love death. The gentle and incomparable Rabindranath Tagore once said: "It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers. It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth and of death, in ebb and flow. . . . And, because I love this life, I know that I shall love death as well." In contrast to the Orient there are nations, like

Mexico, where worship of death has been cultivated as an expression of individual courage. This contempt for life and love for death is perhaps responsible for the fact that Mexico has produced more revolutionaries and bullfighters than any other country in Latin America.

No one has taught us better than the mystics to cultivate the desire to die in order to attain the immortality of union with God. Years ago I wrote an essay on the mystic psychology of St. Teresa of Jesus. I also made a study of Spanish mysticism, and my attention was caught by its many analogies with Hindu mysticism, to which I had previously devoted a book. St. Teresa, a pure, honest Castilian woman, spent many years in the sonorous silence of her jasmine-scented cell, intimately communing with God. Her stirringly profound verses later inspired her disciple, St. John of the Cross, who, speaking of his beloved Master, said, "He left them clad in His beauty." And St. Teresa in her famous verse said:

This life I am living is a deprivation of living
And so is continual dying
Until I live with Thee.
Hear O, Lord, what I say,
That I want not this life,
That I am dying because I do not die.

Just as lovers throughout the course of history have killed themselves because they could not break down the barrier of the flesh to make possible the perfect union of their souls, so also mystics, craving to unite themselves with the deity, have sought to destroy the corporeal substance that barred them from the total possession of the Beloved. For that reason, as St. Ignatius of Loyola advised, they mortified the flesh in a slow daily suicide of the body. The ecstasies

and raptures of mystics, from Plotinus of Alexandria to St. Teresa have been *muertes pequeñas* or little deaths (García Lorca's own description for the sexual act), transitory deaths during life. At such moments their bodies remained alive but without a soul, the field of consciousness contracting in such manner that, lacking memories and hopes, past and future, there remained solely the image of the deity flooding their souls with its radiant glory.

The great physician and humanist Sir Thomas Browne spoke much about death in his *Religio medici:* "We term sleep a death, and yet it is a waking that kills us, and destroys those spirits that are the house of life. 'Tis indeed a part of life that best expresseth death, for every man truly lives, so long as he acts his nature, or some way makes good the faculties of himself. . . ." And before going to sleep, he would say:

> Sleepe is a death; O make me try,
> By sleeping, what it is to die:
> And as gently lay my head
> On my grave, as now my bed.
> Howere I rest, great God, let me
> Awake again at last with thee.
> And thus assur'd, behold I lie
> Securely, or to awake or die,
> These are my drowsie days; in vain
> I do now wake to sleep again:
> O come that hour, when I shall never
> Sleep again, but wake for ever.

To which he added: "This is the Dormative I take to bedward, I need no other *Laudanum* than this to make me sleep: after which, I close mine eyes in security, content to take my leave of the Sun, and sleep unto the resurrection."

We should always remember that death is the biologic price we pay for our differentiation on the zoologic ladder, and that before sex made its appearance, organisms were biologically immortal, inasmuch as primary beings do not reach senescence nor succumb to natural death. Only man possesses the luxury of "natural" death and of desiring death.

Carl Jung, speaking profoundly and wisely about death, narrated a dream he had had in which he saw a yogi, seated in the lotus posture and sunk in deep meditation, whose face was the same as his own. This caused Jung to think on waking that the yogi "is the one who is meditating me. He has a dream, and I am it," and that when the yogi woke up, that dream, that is to say, Jung, "would no longer be." Jung's idea was that part of man's soul was not subject to the laws of time and space. For that reason, perhaps, Jung liked the karma theory, the theory of action and reaction in human life, and for the same reason the oriental theory of successive reincarnations is so appealing to many of us. Said Jung: "The decisive question for man is: Is he related to something infinite or not? That is the telling question of his life. Only if we know that the thing which truly matters is the infinite can we avoid fixing our interest upon futilities, and upon all kinds of goals which are not of real importance."

Today the apocalyptic terrors engendered by the threat of nuclear warfare have produced a remarkable paradox: although the increase in longevity, made possible by the progress in medicine, has been accompanied by a parallel increase in the fear of "natural" death through old age or disease, on the other hand, despite its growing threat, the fear of atomic death has diminished. The Dantesque vision of a nuclear holocaust that would destroy millions of people has, by dint of being ever-present in people's minds, suc-

ceeded in rendering them insensible to such a horrendous fate. The notion that *everyone* without exception is exposed, by chance or deliberate calculation, to destruction in a few minutes by the hydrogen bomb has made sudden collective death less frightening to people than the idea of their *individual* deaths from cancer, coronary occlusion, or encephalitis. The magnitude of the collective nuclear risk has dwarfed its psychologic impact on the individual.

The same attitude of philosophic stoicism that people in the mass have adopted in the face of collective death from nuclear war should also be applied to individual death from disease or accident. To attain this, it will not be enough to conquer the fear of natural death, as we have in the case of atomic death, but we must also cultivate the idea of dying with wisdom and dignity as a fine end to a fine life. *Un bel morir tutta la vita onora* (A noble death is an honor to a life), as the Italians say.

Let us learn, then, to go forth to our meeting with death as though we were going into a scented garden under a bright autumn moon to receive the pure, cool kiss of a pale sweetheart. Only then shall we be able to end our pilgrimage through life with the words of the gentle St. Francis of Assisi: "Welcome! O Sister Death!"

practiced bhakti toward his gurus. He described the correct attitude in an illustration about Sri Krishna's disciple, Arjuna. Krishna had pointed out some birds to Arjuna and identified them as pigeons. Arjuna saw that they were pigeons. But a moment later Krishna said that the birds were not pigeons at all. Arjuna responded that now he could see that indeed they were not pigeons. This was not a yes-man's acquiescence. "Such faith had Arjuna in Krishna," was Ramakrishna's comment, "that what Krishna said, Arjuna perceived at once to be actually true."

No, what such knowers of God practiced, I cannot term only customary. The wonder of their lives has established this tradition as spiritually necessary.

What *is* the secret of guru-bhakti? It is, I perceive, simply that, as a preliminary to knowing God, one *must* learn to surrender oneself; submit one's will to a visible spiritual authority, gladly, through love. One does it, of course, not for the guru's sake, but wholly for one's own sake. But how one shrinks from submitting! Yet surely if one cannot unreservedly devote oneself to the Good one has seen, how can one hope to adore the Good one has not seen?

Nor is there anything unique to Vedanta in this. The same stress is found in Christianity. Christ taught us to become as little children. Thomas à Kempis in his *The Imitation of Christ* commends loving obedience toward one's religious superior in the strongest terms. And confession becomes an act of self-abnegation before God's representative.

Then why does one resist? Why does one conjure up rational reasons for remaining one's own master? Pride, vanity, self-love. What must be eliminated if one is to progress spiritually? Pride, vanity, self-love. How to rid oneself of such egotistic tendencies most painlessly, most positively? Practice of guru-bhakti. The process, which can lead us to the highest result, is as simple—and demanding—as that.



Vedanta and the West

Vedanta teaches that man's real nature is divine; that it is the aim of man's life to unfold and manifest this divinity; and that truth is universal. Vedanta accepts all the religions of the world and reveres the great prophets, teachers, and sons of God, because it recognizes the same divine inspiration in all.

STUDENT'S NOTEBOOK No. 31

I have been thinking lately about the practice of "guru-bhakti" and trying to understand its ways and wherefores. Vedanta teaches that utter devotion to one's preceptor is fundamental to progress; in fact, that if the relationship of the disciple to the teacher is not one of unreserved submission and selfless reverence, the disciple cannot hope to make spiritual progress.

Is there any rational, psychological basis for this extreme doctrine? Or is the guru-bhakti concept merely a religious custom?

Swami Vivekananda said: "Without faith, humility . . . and veneration . . . toward our religious teacher, there cannot be any growth in religion in us; and it is a significant fact that where this kind of relation . . . prevails, there alone gigantic spiritual men are growing." The intensity of Swamiji's devotion to his own teacher is proverbial. Sri Ramakrishna, in turn,

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A Real Devotee

DOROTHY F. MERCER: *Contrasts*

SWAMI BUDHANANDA
Universal Imperatives Of the Bhagavad-Gita



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WHAT VEDANTA MEANS TO ME

BENJAMIN SALTMAN

FOR ABOUT two years I have been thinking about what Vedanta means to me. Until now I have been unable to write anything, but recently I have come to understand that Vedanta means one central thing to me: the guru. With the guru comes religion; without the guru, the individual gropes among scriptures and dogmas, inspired here, confused there.

The guru is the voice of God. Through him comes the answer to my question: what shall I do to find God? The answer comes through the guru, through his instructions, through his presence. The way he walks and smiles is the answer, and the way he talks of God, with certainty, with devotion, without sentimentality—that also is the answer.

After all, what can I achieve with only a concept of God? By profession, I am a teacher. I live with concepts; I am always trying to distill form from experience, trying to see experience as an abstraction that can be handled and grouped with other abstractions. I love ideas, but I also know that they are treacherous, ambiguous; they can be used for evil or for good; they have been twisted to suit fantastic prejudices. A concept of God is not enough.

I think I began to know what religion is when I saw it walking around in the person of the guru. Then I knew that religion was *this* peace, *this* firmness of mind, *this* childlike honesty, fearless and gentle.

As an American I share the pluralist confusions of my time and my country. Never before have so many voices addressed men from so many points of view. The problem now is not survival; it is direction, the choice of a path which will somehow satisfy us beyond the moment. We are less in danger of starvation than of self-destruction. The most difficult thing for an American to do is to ask himself what he is doing. It seems better not to know, better to go from day to day reaching for the brass rings of a materialistic society, better to tell oneself that there is nothing else to reach for. But when he does ask the question, knowing that he cannot avoid asking it, he must realize, as I had to realize, that he cannot live his life except in an ultimate context. He must ask a total question, he must ask a religious question: what is God? Into that question, if he has asked it totally, he has poured all of himself. He has not merely asked a metaphysical question; he wants to know God, experience God, talk with him, be filled with him, realize him in the deepest part of his soul, be united with him forever, end fear and ignorance forever.

But as a beginner can he really ask this question? No, he can only mew weakly; even in the grip of worldly misery, even when he shouts in pain, he cannot ask the total question, which must be asked with the bones, muscles, and nerves, which must be asked getting up in the morning and lying down at night. He does not even know whether what he feels is God's presence or not. He reads about saints; they are inspiring, but they seem odd and extreme; they seem to be

supermen. He goes to a church. Is this smell of incense religion? Are these pictures religion?

Perhaps he reads, in the Upanishads,"That thou art." The brief sentence may well express the greatest moment of insight man has ever had, but what does it mean? What does it mean to me when I am drinking a cup of coffee? What does it mean in a land of astronauts and *Mary Poppins*, surfing and Civil Rights? When I think of "That thou art," perhaps I feel a thrill very much like a thrill of ego satisfaction. Am I indeed God? Perhaps I am, indeed; but what a miserable God!

I need an answer. I must see what happens when the words of scripture actually live in a man, and I must place myself under the guidance of that man. This is what Vedanta is to me: the guidance of my spiritual life by a spiritually advanced teacher, whose most casual words tell me something of the meaning of "That thou art," of "The Kingdom of God is within you," "Blessed are the meek." He gives me a mantra, which is like my private key to God's room. He interprets my spiritual experiences, he embodies holiness, he demonstrates by the fact that he lives and breathes, smiles and sleeps, that wholeness is feasible, that God is near and is not embarrassed by the skin of man. He leads me to God's feet, his love opens the possibility of love. Whatever my failings may be, whatever my sorrows and bondage, I am blessed.

Is religion anything else? Rituals, dogmas, laws of conduct all have their place. Philosophy has its place. And perhaps the highest place, according to the instructions of the guru, belongs to meditation. But religion is the guru; it is Moses coming down from Mount Sinai carrying the Tables of the Law, his countenance transfigured, shining. The Children of Israel saw in that shining face what it means to know God, to experience him. I see no other religion.

I SINCERELY believe that men have no quarrel about whether or not God exists. They all confess to the limitations of their knowledge.The real quarrel seems to be over the question of how God manifests himself. It is easy enough to say that God manifests himself in the love that men bear one another. But where is that love? It is easy enough to say that God revealed himself two thousand years ago. But where is he now? It is easy enough to argue for God's benevolence working through nature. But where is that benevolence? No, we must see him in a living saint whom we can touch.

In the long run, my religious life is my own: I must have the inner confirmation of my heart's experience. No one can realize God for me; I am responsible. I would be foolish to deny that at times charlatans set themselves up as gurus and proceed to delude spiritual aspirants. I must make a choice. Furthermore, the guru who I think is holy may be considered quite ordinary by another man. There is no automatic way to God, no objective measure of holiness. But the guru, the living vessel of God, is the closest we can come on earth, with earthly eyes, to a vision of the complete answer to the complete question. To me, therefore, the guru and the guru-disciple relationship is at the heart of Vedanta. It has taken me two years to realize it.

A REAL DEVOTEE

SWAMI VIDYATMANANDA

THE TIME is Christmas Eve, 1963. The place is the great temple of Sri Ramakrishna at Belur Math on the Ganges. In a few days the final and most important celebrations marking the Centenary of the birth of Swami Vivekananda are to take place. Swamis, brahmacharis, and devotees have traveled to the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission from many parts of India. From other places in the Far East, from Europe, and from America additional visitors have come. On the evening of which I write, many of these people are assembled in the temple for the annual worship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A temporary altar has been set up in the nave of the temple at right angles to the shrineroom. All afternoon the brahmacharis of Belur Math, assisted by students from nearby Ramakrishna schools, have been busy decorating the altar. Many kinds of food, especially dishes popular in the West, have been set out as offerings. In the center of the altar stands a beautiful colored picture of the Madonna and Child.

My eyes are drawn to this picture. For I have heard the story of where it came from and why it is here: "The picture of Christ they were using at Belur Math was small and not very well printed. I decided that, when passing through Europe on my way home, I would purchase the finest print I could obtain, of a good painting of the Madonna and Child; and I would send it to Belur Math for their Christmas

worship." This is what Dorothy Mercer had told me in Hollywood, after her return from India in 1959.

Now I am at Belur Math, and there before me is Dorothy's gift on the Christmas shrine. And Dorothy is dead. She never saw, will never see, the present she gave in its place of honor.

Dorothy loved India. Her trip in 1958-59 wrought a great change in her. True, Dorothy Mercer had always been a Vedantist; but India turned Dorothy into a Real Devotee.

WHO WAS Dorothy Mercer? I shall try to describe, for those who did not know her, something of Dorothy's life and personality. And those who were her friends, in India and in the West, will perhaps be pleased, by reading these words, to think of her once again. I write about Dorothy because of friendship and a desire to preserve a little longer the memory of a fine person.

More than that, I write about Dorothy because she stands for something important. The example she provided offers proof that what the scriptures tell us, what the teachers say, is true. Religion *does* work. Religion worked for Dorothy. The last years of her life were marked by a growing sweetness of character. The final stage, so tragic, was made bearable by Dorothy's faith. And her death can only be called wonderful, as the death of a real devotee must be.

IN THE early 1950's, Dorothy Mercer contributed to *Vedanta and the West* magazine a personal statement on "What Vedanta Means to Me." This was later published, along with fifteen other articles on that subject, in a book of the same title.

In her story Dorothy tells how she had been associated

with Vedanta from her very birth, at San Francisco in 1901. "I was born into the Vedanta," she says. Dorothy's family attended the Vedanta Society of Northern California. The swami in charge from 1903 to 1914 was Swami Trigunatita, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. Dorothy recalls that, although she was just a little girl, she was greatly impressed by Swami Trigunatita. Now and then he would come to her home to visit her parents, her, and her brother. At least once, Dorothy remembers, Swami Trigunatita held her on his lap. Once every week Dorothy used to go with her mother to the Hindu Temple at 2963 Webster Street, San Francisco, to see the Swami. "To others," she recalls, "Swami's office was cluttered up; to me it was finely ordered. There were stereopticon slides, a revolving globe of the world, Swami's resplendent watch fob, a roll-top desk piled high with papers; and no 'don't touch' admonitions." Finally, "There was a round, red, stained-glass window opening on the street which, on our last visit to his office, Swami told me was a motion picture." Later in her article Dorothy explains that the Swami had used this device to teach her that worldly things which one may think are real are only a passing show, having no lasting substantiality at all.

Later, as a young woman, Dorothy became acquainted with a second direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Abhedananda. He lived and worked in the San Francisco region from 1918 to 1921. "Not only did I go to all of Abhedananda's lectures and classes, but during this period I read Swami Vivekananda assiduously. I too wanted to be a philosopher, a sannyasin no less." Here Dorothy quotes from Swamiji's "Song of the Sannyasin":

> Strike off thy fetters! Bonds that bind thee down,
> Of shining gold. . . .

"That I had no 'shining gold' to 'strike off' did not deter me from marching right along—in imagination."

By doing office work to earn funds to attend the university, Dorothy gained a good education and eventually became a college teacher. She took one of her degrees at Oxford at the time Dr. S. Radhakrishnan was there as Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics. For many years Dorothy was an instructor in English at San Francisco City College. Among other subjects, she taught the Bhagavad-Gita as literature.

Dorothy died of cancer on Thursday, March 8, 1962, in San Francisco. Curiously, in 1962 Sri Ramakrishna's birthday fell on that very same day, March 8. There was no funeral. Dorothy had willed her body to the University of California Medical School.

ALTHOUGH she lived most of the year in San Francisco, Dorothy used to travel south frequently. She had long vacations from her college at Christmastime and in the summer. Dorothy was a member of the Vedanta Society of Southern California and was a disciple of Swami Prabhavananda. She often spent her holidays as a guest at the Hollywood ashrama. Over a period of years we grew to know Dorothy rather well.

Dorothy was nearly six feet tall. She wore spectacles. She was somewhat professorial in manner. Being slightly deaf; and furthermore, being accustomed to addressing large classes of college students, she talked loudly and with intense positiveness. In the days before 1959, our dinner table was the scene for many strong pronouncements. Dorothy had an intense interest in Plato; probably one reason she liked Plato was that she felt the philosophy of Plato substantiated the philosophy of Vedanta, in Western terms. But Dorothy's in-

terests were wide. She was an enthusiastic liberal, and had strong convictions on the many situations in the world which were not, in her eyes, what they should be.

Being firmly convinced of the superiority of Vedanta, Dorothy could not see how anyone could but accept its teachings. Indeed as Dorothy herself once jested, in her defense of the tolerant Vedanta her attitude almost bordered on intolerance. In 1957 she started writing a book for Western readers, whose purpose was to set forth the logicality of Vedanta philosophy. As part of this effort Dorothy conceived the idea of distributing a questionnaire, to be answered by members of Vedanta societies in America, telling of their satisfaction with the faith they had accepted. This questionnaire was sent to more than two hundred Vedanta members, of whom nearly half responded. Dorothy felt that the first-hand testimonies of the respondents were useful in providing facts supporting the special excellence of Vedanta theory and practice.

We in Hollywood could see, of course, that beneath her academic exterior Dorothy had a good sense of humor and was basically lovable and loving. She certainly was most generous. Still and all, she was very argumentative, very severe in her judgments of those having views differing from her own. In those pre-1959 days, we at the Vedanta Society of Southern California mostly thought of Dorothy as a well-meaning, but rather dry, intellectual.

THEN in 1958-59, on a sabbatical from her college, Dorothy went to India. She stayed from November through March, and as a ward of the Ramakrishna Mission, toured India with characteristic energy. In the letters she wrote to Hollywood, in a detailed account of her pilgrimage composed in India and airmailed to us from abroad, and most of all in the

changed attitudes she manifested upon her return, we saw the emergence of a different person.

It can easily be imagined that many things in India were upsetting to Dorothy. She was an idealist, to whom every human's economic well-being, opportunity for social progress, and physical welfare meant much. The poor conditions she saw distressed her deeply.

Yet the goodness she encountered: the sweetness of the people, the charm of the children, the devotional qualities expressed by common men and women—these more than made up for all sights of human misery. And particularly touching was the affection expressed toward her by many swamis of the Ramakrishna Order.

Dorothy wrote just before leaving India, in a letter dated March 23, 1959, and postmarked at Belur Math: "This is the last letter from this beloved address." In that letter she went on to describe how a number of young men, who had just been initiated into sannyas and brahmacharya on Ramakrishna's birthday, had come to the quarters she shared with two or three Western visitors, to perform their first act of ceremonial begging. "The day after Sri Ramakrishna's birthday," the account goes, "the new swamis and brahmacharis came to us to beg. To feed forty-nine young men radiant with love is quite an experience. On Sri Ramakrishna's birthday they [the sannyasins-to-be] attended their own funeral; the day after they were reborn in God. They were living in such a beautiful, bright haze that we were almost overcome. [One of our members] had to leave the room, he was so close to tears. I wasn't close to tears; I seemed to partake of their happiness."

The account of her experiences, which Dorothy sent to us before her return, was equally indicative. In her descriptions of the holy places she had gone to in India, the rituals she

had witnessed, the devotional qualities she had observed, we saw that Dorothy had truly understood and appreciated the spirit of the country. Perhaps the most revealing statement in the article was that she mentioned, with obvious pleasure, that she was addressed by Indians as "Mother Dorothy." Mother Dorothy! We could imagine nothing less characteristic of the person we knew than that she would appear motherly—and moreover, that she should take pleasure in so appearing and in being so addressed. Obviously, something had happened to Dorothy.

After her return from India, Dorothy continued to spend her vacations with us. But now the subject matter of our table conversations was very different. Dorothy talked of nothing but the people and places she had known in India, connected with Sri Ramakrishna and his Math and Mission. She often described the love expressed by several of the senior swamis: Gurudas Maharaj (Swami Atulananda) whom she had known as a little girl in San Francisco; Swamis Madhavananda and Dayananda, who had worked for a time in the mid-twenties at the Vedanta Society of Northern California and were already known to her; Swami Sankarananda, the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission; "lovable" Bharat Maharaj (Swami Abhayananda); and "dear" Sujji Maharaj (Swami Nirvanananda). The inspiring, and the bizarre, experiences she had had now made up the table talk. The old argumentative, didactic personality had vanished. How comfortable it was now to be with Dorothy! It was obvious to us that, as one of our number remarked: "India made Dorothy a devotee."

BUT THERE was not much time remaining for Dorothy to enjoy India in retrospect. She had been vouchsafed her ex-

perience; it had done for her what was to be done; and she was soon to vanish from this world. In the summer of 1961 Dorothy came to stay with us in Hollywood as usual. But by August she was experiencing certain physical difficulties and thought it best to hasten back to her doctor in San Francisco. It was discovered that Dorothy had cancer of a type which spreads with great rapidity. She was almost continually in the hospital from the autumn on until she died in the following spring.

During the fall and winter we did not hear from Dorothy directly. We do not know what her thoughts consisted of during this time. Probably she kept her silence because, with typical independence—and perhaps with a new evenness of mind—she did not want to make herself a problem to others. But we kept informed as to her condition through some of her relatives who lived in San Francisco. In late February these relatives let us know that Dorothy probably had very little longer to live. I was sent to San Francisco, as a representative of Swami Prabhavananda and Dorothy's many friends at the Vedanta Society, to express the love of those in Hollywood and to see whether there was anything she needed or wanted. I took with me a small vial of precious Ganges water. It is customary in India for those who are about to die to take Ganges water, thus feeling blessed and purified. Dorothy knew about this custom.

The person I saw, when I walked into Dorothy's hospital room, was almost unrecognizable. Dorothy had grown so old and thin it was heartbreaking. As best I could I gave the messages from Hollywood. On her part, in halting voice, interrupted by spells of weakness, Dorothy spoke again of the familiar, sweet experiences of her happy time in India.

I went back to see Dorothy the following day. "Dorothy," I asked, "is there anything you need, anything that anyone

can do for you? Swami Prabhavananda will come to see you, if you want him to. And, Dorothy, maybe you would like to have this." I placed the small bottle on the bedside table. "It is Ganges water."

For a moment Dorothy was almost like her old severe self again. "I am not going to die. I am going to recover. It is very dear of Swami to offer to come to see me. But it will not be necessary at all." But I think it was then that Dorothy made her final surrender. Within a week she had sent word that, yes, she would appreciate seeing her guru.

Swami Prabhavananda went to San Francisco to see Dorothy on March 2. Dorothy accepted with great devotion the Ganges water that the Swami gave to her. She said she knew what it meant. She told the Swami: "I know I am going to die; and it is all right." She said that she was maintaining, every moment, the recollectedness of Sri Ramakrishna. She said: "I know that Swami Trigunatita is going to come for me." And this is how, six days later, it was.

AT THE end of her "What Vedanta Means to Me," written long before, Dorothy quotes her beloved Plato: " . . . whereby being near to and married with true being, and begetting reason and truth, he came to knowledge and true life and nourishment, and then, and only then, ceased from the travail of his soul." Dorothy concludes her article with a query: "Why should not the small hope I have had after every fleeting glimpse of true being sustain me now in a larger hope? Can I not too be nourished? Am I not a legitimate child of the Divine Mother as Sri Ramakrishna reminded his devotees?"

To this question the answer is now known: A positive, reassuring Yes.

CONTRASTS

DOROTHY F. MERCER

BELUR MATH can be approached in three ways: via the Ganges, via a turnstile from a neighboring residential area, and via the Grand Trunk Road north and south. By far the most dramatic approach is by way of the Grand Trunk Road. Built by the British for military purposes and running from Calcutta to Delhi and beyond, the Grand Trunk Road in Howrah (a suburb north of Calcutta) is one of the most teeming and noisy, albeit fascinating, thoroughfares in the world. The dust and carbon monoxide are almost as hard on the throat and eyes as the smog in Los Angeles; and the odor almost as pungent as that once given off by San Francisco Bay at low tide.

The dust is stirred up by bullock-drawn carts with heavy loads of jute, bamboo, scrap-iron; by man-drawn carts with equally heavy loads; by the wandering cows; by jog-trotting men with man-dwarfing packs on their heads of unthreshed grain or mattresses or aluminum pots; by what we Americans would call picturesque horse-drawn carriages, but in Howrah functional objects of pride to their owners; by donkeys loaded so immensely that they can scarcely be seen for the load; by crowded-to-capacity and beyond capacity busses; by loaded-to-capacity auto trucks; by man-drawn and bicycle-drawn

rickshaws; by private autos and taxis often antiquated; by people walking—men, women, children, babies.

Except for the sky and trees, everything seems to move in an incessant struggle for position. What the density of population is, I do not know. That it is very dense is obvious to the most casual observer. The density has been increased by the refugees from East Bengal, now East Pakistan. The partition of Bengal is unnatural and its results are appalling.

A HALF block off the Grand Trunk Road and through a high gate in a high fence is the Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math. Suddenly the noise stops, and the music of birds is heard. Cows are quietly ruminating, grazing, lying down on the green and clean grass. Lovely old trees, also green and clean, some blossoming, shade the area. In front is the Hooghly, as the principal branch of the Ganges is called. A high brick wall keeps it from washing into the compound at high tide; and from the wall or from the broad brick steps leading down into the holy water can be seen the river life going quietly by.

The Ganges, like the Grand Trunk Road, compared to Belur Math presents a study in contrast. Wide and swiftly flowing, the gray-brown river water contrasts with the green grass of the compound. On the river are man-rowed boats mostly; but there are also sailboats, steamboats, modern motorboats. Practically all are gray or brown, including the men who stand and jointly row rhythmically as they probably did a thousand or more years ago. Occasionally, a dead fish or something else edible will float to the surface of the water; it is immediately consumed by the constantly watching vultures. Flying high, the vulture concentrates on what is low. Low and not flying at all, the sadhus—swamis and brahmacharis—of the compound concentrate on what is high.

Or, metaphorically and more exactly, the vulture never leaves the ground whereas the sadhu never sets foot on it.

The temple of Sri Ramakrishna dominates the Belur Math compound. It is a magnificent, beige-colored sandstone building, with a spacious marble-floored natmandir or prayer hall. This prayer hall is only one of the temple's distinctive features: architecturally, the temple is designed to represent many religions—Hindu, Moslem, Christian, Buddhist—symbolizing thereby the varied religious experiences of the great modern saint of India, Sri Ramakrishna.

Closer to the river and facing the compound are the temples of Sri Ramakrishna's best-known and most beloved disciples, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Brahmananda.

The temple of Vivekananda is two-storied; the first story containing a marble statue of him in yoga posture, and the second story, very elegant and very simple, the holy word Om (the Absolute) in Sanskrit, singularly appropriate because of Vivekananda's emphasis on Advaita, or nondualistic, Vedanta. This temple is visited with deep reverence by Western devotees who remember that he gave to the West four of his most productive years. The principal dome of this temple is topped by the trident, a symbol of Shiva, supreme god of yoga. It will be recollected that Ramakrishna had a vision of Vivekananda as a rishi—an eternal yogi—long before Vivekananda became Ramakrishna's disciple.

The temple of Swami Brahmananda is one-storied so far as public worship is concerned, its domes topped by the discus of Vishnu. Brahmananda is the eternal companion of Lord Krishna, as Ramakrishna saw also in vision and as Brahmananda himself realized. And since Krishna is the most beloved incarnation of Vishnu, and Brahmananda is to his disciples love personified, the discus of Vishnu is also singularly appropriate.

In between the temples of Swami Vivekananda and Swami Brahmananda is the temple of the Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna's wife. This temple faces the Ganges and is the most frequented of the three; it is second only to the temple of Sri Ramakrishna in popularity. It is a simple shrine, easily approachable, like the Holy Mother herself. Used in both the Durga and Kali pujas (religious festivals), it may face the Ganges because the river also is worshiped as Mother, as my bearer informs me. Or it may face the Ganges because in both pujas—Durga and Kali—the Divine Mother, the Great Goddess, is worshiped. Her image is then immersed in the river, having first said farewell to her human prototype, the Holy Mother.

The Belur Math compound is large, and the many buildings are set well apart. The whole is spacious, serene, and uplifting. In addition to the temples, there are offices, monks' quarters, and a guesthouse. The swamis in gerua (ocher robes) and with black umbrellas walk to and fro as duty dictates and spirit wills. Those who are in charge sit in their offices (plain, bare rooms which often serve also as their bedrooms) consulting, talking, and writing.

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION, Belur Math, is the headquarters for the vast organization of the Ramakrishna Order with its branches all over the world, principally, however, as is natural, in India. And yet, although the business—poor word, "business," for a purely philanthropic and spiritual activity—involves many millions of dollars, the swamis who do the administering are always available to the least, most unimportant "pilgrim."

I was met on my arrival at the Dum Dum Airport, for instance, by Swami Dayananda. He is the head of one of the

best, most modern hospitals in Calcutta. Over 50 per cent of its cases are charity; the cases which are not free pay for the free; and the reputation of the Ramakrishna Order being what it is, the list of waiting pay-patients is long. Swami Dayananda is obviously a busy sadhu, but because I had known him when he was in San Francisco some twenty-five years previously, he met me, drove me to Belur Math, and sent out an unused hospital bed for me to sleep on: Hindu beds are too hard for us soft Americans!

The second day after my arrival I was taken by Bharat Maharaj (Swami Abhayananda) to meet the President of this great organization, Swami Sankarananda. This is somewhat comparable to having an audience with the Pope; and anyone who has had an audience with the Pope will remember the many formalities, instructions, and antechambers. He will also remember kissing the Pope's ring and receiving his blessing as he stands in line.

At Belur Math a gong is rung to signify when Swami Sankarananda is free. The only instructions I received were at Belur Math to talk little—Swami Sankarananda had been very sick—and at home before I left the United States, to take the dust of the President's feet. Being tall, wearing glasses, and not being used to taking the dust of swamis' feet, I was told that I need not take the dust of any sadhus' feet except the President's. In advance of my "audience" at Belur Math, I had taken the dust of my dear Swami Madhavananda's feet to make sure that I should not lose my glasses—this was a real hazard because of perspiration in the humid, early October weather of Calcutta—; or my balance—another danger for one so tall.

Incidentally, Swami Madhavananda is the General Secretary of the Mission and Math, a position carrying heavy responsibility. He is third in command, as it were: the Presi-

dent, Swami Sankarananda, and the Vice-President, Swami Vishuddhananda, only preceding him. I had known and admired Swami Madhavananda too in San Francisco years before and had recently corresponded with him extensively.

Lovable Bharat Maharaj presented me to the President. I put my hands together in front of my forehead and stooped to take the dust of his feet. When down, I discovered to my consternation that there were no feet from which to take the dust. There were two flower-filled shoes but no feet. What was the matter? What to do? This was a contingency that I had not anticipated. And I could not, of course, fumble around on the floor for any length of time. I came up, touched my forehead, and mumbled something about the great honor. . . . President Maharaj immediately asked me about Swami Prabhavananda and Hollywood. In answering, I was greatly relieved to notice that, like so many Hindus, he was sitting in yoga posture, his legs crossed, and his feet perfectly natural and healthy-looking up on his chair.

ONE OF MANY experiences to show the practical and thoughtful kindness of the swamis in spite of heavy regular duties: All the weather since I had left San Francisco on September 2 had been "unusual"—that is, hot. Portland was hot, Seattle hot, Japan hot. Hong Kong was hot until the typhoon; Singapore was hot; Bangkok was hot, and there, as is evidently common, I had the "Bangkok bellyache," a very unpleasant illness akin to food poisoning. Rangoon was hot. When I landed at Calcutta, it too was "unusually" hot. From over a month of unaccustomed heat, from the suppressed excitement of really being in India, from losing my appetite, from perhaps not having fully recovered from the "Bangkok bellyache," I became sick.

Sujji Maharaj, Swami Nirvanananda, the Treasurer of this great organization, came to see me. "What's the matter?" he asked. On replying that I had a cold (that is what I thought I had), that I was too weak to go to the Temple (I should have remembered that colds do not make me weak), and that I was upset to cause him and others so much trouble, he answered, "Nothing; just another item; I shall send the doctor."

Being called an "item" by such a kindly, spirited Swami amused me so much that I began to improve then and there. And when the doctor came—a man who gives his services freely to the Mission—and diagnosed my case as simple loss of appetite, curable by a more varied diet—no more rice or bananas or forced eating—I began to perk up. The Durga Puja, which I shall shortly attempt to describe, followed almost immediately; and then we (another Western devotee and myself) decided to go to Darjeeling.

"Fine," said Sujji Maharaj, "stay for ten days." (Of course, I do not think that *we* decided to go at all as neither of us had planned to go to Darjeeling; I think the idea had been put into our heads.) No words can give an idea of the beauty of the Kanchenjunga and the other mountains of eternal snow seen at sunrise and sunset at Darjeeling. But while there I thought now and again of Indian food with uncertainty and wondered whether it were practical for me to continue on in India.

When we returned to Belur Math I noticed that the bearer, a nice young man of whom we had become fond, had, so we thought, a friend with him. For dinner, wonder of wonders, we had a good, Western-type meal. "I, cooker," the "friend" of the bearer identified himself. When I saw Sujji Maharaj and told him of this wonder, asking whence it came, he answered, "Guru Maharaj," meaning Sri Rama-

krishna. "I think firmly nothing is impossible to Guru Maharaj if he wish." Well, Guru Maharaj via Sujji Maharaj, and I am still in India thanks to an important swami who gives thought to his smallest "items" and has great faith.

I was happy and relieved to have a "cooker." I made my going to Benares, New Delhi, Kankhal, Agra, Vrindaban contingent upon the retention of the "cooker." Consulting with Swami Yatiswarananda, who had now come to Belur Math for the Monks' Conference and who was the other Westerner's guru, I asked if he thought the "cooker" could be retained. His eyes widened appreciatively, or did they because of puzzlement and/or amusement? Anyway, he asked why I called the cook a "cooker." "Because," said I, "he said he was a cooker." Thereupon, Swami Yatiswarananda laughed. I had made the same mistake as the cook himself, assuming that because in Indian the man who acts as a combined houseboy, maid, and messenger is called a "bearer," a cook in India is called a "cooker."

There is very little begging at Belur Math. It is not that the Ramakrishna Mission does not concern itself with the poor; indeed, that is one of its main reasons for existence. One day while waiting to use one of the two telephones with which this large institution manages to do business, I happened to glance at some files. They read something like this: DESTITUTE; POOR FAMILIES; POOR STUDENTS; EMERGENCY FUND FOR POOR. And I have seen the suppliants come and receive money, make their mark (thumbprint) in evidence that they have received so many rupees, and then again take the dust of the swami's feet who dispenses.

IN ADDITION to the monks in gerua walking to and fro on the compound, there are the brahmacharis (those who have

taken their first vows of renunciation) in white robes. There are also the bearers, usually dressed in white dhoti (the native Bengali dress for men); the sweepers; the temple guards; and the visitors.

The sweepers literally sweep. At Belur Math, sweeping is a major job. Every day the whole compound is swept; leaves are raked; lavatories cleaned; some, not all, of the cow dung picked up—some is left for fertilizer. The sweepers, like the bearers, wear the dhoti; but over the dhoti they wear what is called a napkin. This is a colored cloth, draped like a short skirt.

The temple guards are dressed in smart brown khaki uniforms: they see that nothing unseemly goes on either in the temples or on the compound. They are slight young men, mostly Gurkhas. I hope that my reader has the same romantic associations with the name Gurkha that I have. The Gurkhas are the loyal, dependable North India and Nepal hill people so relied on by the British during their occupation. Gurkhas are famous for their unquestioning bravery and for their fidelity to the person or cause they are serving. On the temple compound the guards are usually obeyed, whether because of their reputation or because the Hindus are naturally law-abiding.

Then, of course, there are visitors—they are often referred to as "bhaktas" or devotees.

The Belur Math compound is open to the public from 6:30 A.M. to 12:00 noon and from 3:30 P.M. to 6:30 P.M. from October to March; and from April to September from 5:30 A.M. to noon and from 4:00 P.M. to 7:30 P.M. On special occasions such as puja days, the time is extended. The people come to bathe in the Ganges at the Belur ghat (the broad steps leading down into the river); to pay homage to Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, Vivekananda, and Brah-

mananda; to enjoy the peaceful serenity and spiritual uplift the compound affords; to take the dust of the swamis' feet, and to pass a few words with the swamis. The largest number come for arati, or evening prayers.

The people, on the whole, are cleanly but not elaborately dressed. Some Indian men's clothes in winter are a delight to the American. He sees in them what he imagines are ancient Greek and Biblical costumes—and there but for a matter of a few centuries go Socrates and Plato, Joseph and his brethren. Gracefully draped yardage covers the body wholly or uncovers it, mostly depending on the weather, the dust, the mosquitoes. Six yards can cover a man entirely and with a natural elegance no Western garb can achieve. The variations seem endless: I have seen one yard, maybe twenty-seven inches wide, serve as head covering protecting from the sun, again for warmth on the shoulders, and again as a skirt-apron keeping the dhoti clean.

But the triumph of the Indian dress is the sari, worn by women. The sari is five or six yards of frequently handwoven, brightly-colored cotton or silk, sometimes interwoven with gold or silver, and edged and ended by elaborate patterns. It is draped around the waist to form a skirt, and then over the shoulder to fall in a three-quarter-length drape or over both shoulders and perhaps also over the head to fall half-way down. The pattern on the sari's edge and end, plus the draping, usually give the sari its elegance.

As THE time for evening prayer approaches and the people gather, the coloring of the temple compound becomes gay as a result of the clothes; and a faster rhythm displaces the day's slow, pastoral calm. Arati in the great natmandir of Ramakrishna's temple is impressive. An organ, Indian drums,

a harmonium, conch shells, gongs, and the monks' chanting accompany the stately ritual before the marble figure of the Master. Arati starts with the continuous ringing of a bell. Lights are waved, then fire (burning camphor); holy Ganges water is offered, and flowers. Arati ends with the great sweeps of the lovely large fan. The swami who has performed the ritual with such rhythmic power prostrates full length before the figure which has now come to life in the hearts of the devotees, who in turn bow their heads reverentially. (The point of the ritual is to cleanse not only the swami performing but also the congregation, and by cleansing to uncover the Divinity within and without.)

When arati ends, all, except some who remain for meditation, leave the temple. They must then recover their shoes. Here there is an impasse. For the congregation of three or four hundred people on a Sunday night, there is one young man to handle all the shoes. Two guards watch from the high temple veranda to see that the process is orderly. It takes a long time. To keep a pressing engagement would be impossible unless bare feet were *comme il faut,* and the loss of shoes inconsequential. "This is India," as Swami Dayananda said after showing me his beautiful and very up-to-date Calcutta hospital and then pointing out across the street: Indian slums with pigs, people, dogs, and cows all living in close proximity.

ANOTHER study in contrast is the colorful brilliance, controlled gaiety, music and pomp of the pujas compared to the somber and drab homes and surroundings of so many of the congregation. I arrived in time for the Durga Puja, probably the most important religious festival in Bengal. Durga, who is ten-armed, symbolizing her great power, is one name for

the Divine Mother, the wife of the all-powerful Shiva. Their home is on Mt. Kailas, a mountain both real and mythical in the Himalayas.

Durga's parental home is on earth, and once a year, for three days, she visits her parents. During this time she blesses the good and destroys the evil. She brings with her her two daughters, Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and beauty, and Saraswati, the goddess of art and learning; and her two sons, Kartika, the god of righteous war, and Ganesha, the elephant-headed god of success and prosperity. Durga comes riding a great lion, one of her powerful arms killing the demon of darkness. The gods watch from above with delight this yearly destruction of evil on earth. When evil is destroyed and the good have been blessed, Durga returns to her heavenly home on her mount with her four heavenly children, her earthly children having been cleansed.

For days before the puja proper, workmen and artists were busy in the Belur Math main temple building the images. While the figures were being built, there was not the slightest gesture which would indicate that they were any more than that—just images. The curious, and I was among them, watched the artists as they painted the demon a harsh, dark green and the lion orange. Durga was given a rich gown and a glittering silver halo. I do not remember the color of Lakshmi and Saraswati, but I do remember that the grouping glistened and sparkled as huge electric lights were focused on it.

The puja starts with supplication by way of rolling drums and monks' chanting. Circumambulating the temple compound, the procession carries what seems to be a plantain tree draped in red and white cloth. The marchers wake up the slothful to the business at hand: petitioning Durga to come to earth. On the temple compound, a tree house has

been built of bamboo, festooned with brightly colored cloth, on one side of the house a bamboo ladder. In the house is a Hindu orchestra playing religious music, also soliciting the Great Mother.

More and more people gather, very well dressed, partly because this is the season for buying new clothes, giving gifts, paying up debts, forgiving one's enemies: it is New Year's and Christmas combined. Not only at Belur Math but also all over Bengal, in public places and in private homes, is the image being made and supplication going on. The whole is lighted, both literally and metaphorically, in expectation of the goddess' arrival.

At Belur Math the supplication reaches its height after arati. Now in place of one, three swamis perform, and the organ is displaced by wholly Indian instruments whose playing is increasingly loud and exciting. But above the music can be heard the chanting. According to a Hindu devotee sitting on the floor next to me, the chants go something like this: "We are your little children and we do not know how to pray. Teach us how to pray, for you must come to your father's house for three days in order to drive away evil and to bless the good."

And there is nothing mechanical in the chanting; it is real pleading. The swamis, who are men managing huge organizations, are the ones performing the ritual and doing the pleading. They are not ignorant and superstitious, but well educated and seasoned by life.

The point is that they want to arouse the Durga in themselves and thereby in the congregation; they want to destroy the evil in themselves (if, of course, there is any evil in swamis!) and thereby in the congregation; to feel the goddess' blessing; even to be able to worship the evil as one side of the blessed whole. The congregation follows the ceremony

with all its heart and mind, so that tomorrow at 4:30 A.M. when the ritual resumes, the Durga image will be alive—alive in the heart and mind of each supplicant as well as in the temple. And from then on, the image is more than an image; it is the living goddess. Durga has arrived.

The final ritual is, perhaps, not considered so sacred as the preceding, but from a Westerner's point of view it is the more dramatic. The large compound is crowded almost to capacity for Durga's immersion in the holy Ganga.

That evening following arati we were placed at vantage points so that we could see the final path of the goddess. Hurrying us out of the temple by a side entrance before the ceremony in the temple had been completed, our guide placed us on the front veranda just off of the broad temple steps. In no time at all it was evident why we were so placed: out of the entrance came first the drummers, dancing as they drummed; then musicians carrying vina, conch shell, gongs; then the swamis and brahmacharis who were performing the ritual; and finally the goddess herself, carried by stalwart men and illumined by blinding lights.

The goddess was carried down the stairs and then turned around to face the temple. In front of her danced the drummers and, I believe, some of the brahmacharis, swamis, and members of the congregation. Dazzling and glittering, she stood in triumph, a conquering figure surrounded by her children. In this way, the crowd who could not get into the temple had an opportunity to see her before she was brought to face the Holy Mother, preceding her immersion. When she reached the Holy Mother's temple, a pathway was cleared between her and the picture of the Holy Mother.

Immediately in front of the goddess was performed a dance, the like of which I have never seen. Two young men

who were carrying the large burners of incense whirled until the light of the incense became a circle. As the lighted pieces fell from the burners they put out the embers with their bare dancing feet. They placed the receptacles on their chins and continued the dance with the vessels balanced, their arms and feet becoming multiplied by the rapidity of their movements. All the while clouds of incense added mystery to the goddess and a lovely odor to the atmosphere. As this dance was going on, people were shouting, "Jai (victory) Durga," and conducting private dances of their own, clapping their hands and moving their heads.

When the goddess began to move down the steps to the river, the religious excitement was at high pitch; and when she was finally immersed, a shout came from the crowd.

We were then hustled back into the temple so that we had a seat (on the floor, of course) right next to the swamis where the main sprinkling of holy Ganges water would occur.

Well, I have never been to a Durga Puja before, so I cannot say whether the feeling of love and uplift generated is repeated year after year. Judging by the joyous people, I should say that it was. "If my mortal enemy came to me at this time, I would have to embrace him," one of our dear Hindu friends told us. Knowing the man's sincerity, I do not doubt his statement. I certainly was in an unusually loving mood; I can only attribute it to the Durga Puja.

AFTER Darjeeling I went to Benares and New Delhi, seeing and admiring the work of the Ramakrishna Mission in both places. Having been so happy all through India, I did not believe that I could be any happier. Then came Kankhal, north of Delhi at the foot of the Himalayas. I had not known a thing about Kankhal. Swami Madhavananda, who

had planned my itinerary, had simply said something about seeing the Himalayas and meeting Swami Atulananda, a Dutch-American who had, years before, become a Ramakrishna swami. As a child in California I had known him as Gurudas.

We left Delhi by car—a chauffeur-driven old Austin—bundled up for Alaska weather and carrying box lunches from the Ashoka Hotel. Life was just beginning to start up in Delhi: loaded camels were coming in from the country; herds of goats and sheep were being hurried along; an occasional truck or auto sounded its horn; there were men muffled up with only their eyes showing, presumably walking to work and obviously cold.

Suddenly in front of us were the snow-covered Himalayas, in front of them their so-called foothills—to us another range of high mountains—and beside us, running parallel with the road, the Ganga. This was not the muddy river of Calcutta or Benares, but a clear, cool, mountain current rushing down. (Actually, it is the Ganges Canal built in 1842-54 and extending from Hardwar to Kanpur.) For miles we drove beside it, seeing the mountains of perpetual snow in the distance.

As we began to thaw out, we thought of our lunch. Reaching for it, we were warned by our Indian companion: "You cannot eat meat in Kankhal, Hardwar, or Rishikesh." We had not yet arrived, so we ate some of our chicken sandwiches, leaving the remainder for our return trip in the late afternoon.

At about 10:30 A.M. we arrived at the Ramakrishna Mission Hospital, Kankhal. The sweet, kindly swami in charge welcomed us. He had received the New Delhi swami's telegraph telling of our arrival just fifteen minutes before; so he had had very little time to have the guestroom made

ready. Moreover, there were three of us, whereas the telegraph had only mentioned two. But this swami is the managing head of a hospital which treated 86,967 patients in 1956-7; so what were three unexpected guests? The hospital he manages, like the hospital in Benares, is located in one of the seven sacred cities of India. The Foreword of the Fifty-Seventh Annual Report of the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Kankhal, Hardwar, says:

> In his wanderings, Swami Vivekananda had come in contact with the suffering and helplessness of the ailing monks living in Hardwar and nearby places. One day he told Swami Kalyanananda, one of his disciples, "My boy, can you do something for the ailing monks at Hardwar and Rishikesh? There is none to look after them when they fall ill. Go and serve them." The disciple readily agreed. In June, 1901, he began his work at Kankhal. Two rooms, hired at a monthly rent of three rupees, served as his dispensary, indoor ward, bedroom and office. His stock of medicines was contained in a small box. Living on alms, the Swami distributed medicines not only among those who came to him but also among those others who could not stir out of their huts. This was how this Sevashrama came into being.

The respect the Order commands is much more than simple respect; it verges on awe. Quite by chance and involuntarily this was brought out when I was in Rangoon. There I had gone to see the new wing of the Ramakrishna hospital (recently dedicated, and opened by the President of Burma), and had been given some flowers by a devotee. When I returned to my hotel, I asked my bearer to get a vase for me and, by way of conversation, said that I had seen the new wing of the Ramakrishna Hospital. The bearer looked

at me with interest and spoke with intensity: "Go to Ramakrishna Hospital, live. Go to Government Hospital, die."

The case is probably not so clear-cut, nor is the "government hospital" always the culprit. But the swamis look at their patients, students, and poor as God; they look on themselves as dedicated. For this God, the God in humanity, they have renounced the world. The power in their attitude is conveyed, for the Ramakrishna hospitals have a remarkable record of cures.

That faith plays a major role in their record of cures cannot be gainsaid. At Vrindaban, for instance, where Sri Krishna once played his flute and sported with the gopis, there is a Ramakrishna hospital. It serves the poor and illiterate people over a radius of fifty miles. The people who trudge to the hospital do not even know its name or the names of the swamis. To them, the hospital and the swamis are "Kala Babu," the name of the owner of the house where hospital services were first offered by the Ramakrishna Order in 1907. The sweet swami who showed us around Vrindaban was greeted with loving affection by the townsfolk and trustful supplication by the poor waiting at the hospital gate to see their sick relatives.

Like the hospitals at Benares and Kankhal, Vrindaban serves many pilgrims who, coming to the holy city to worship, fall sick and have no money or relatives to care for them. There is, I understand, a government hospital at Vrindaban; but the people prefer "Kala Babu," and many given up as incurable by the government hospital will in complete confidence present themselves at "Kala Babu" where they are frequently healed. Here Christ's "Thy faith hath made thee whole" is daily demonstrated. And Walt Whitman's observation that invisible currents of sympathy are better for the sick than medicine is again verified.

After washing up at Kankhal, we went to see Swami Atulananda. "Western ladies!" he greeted us as we took the dust of his feet. This was Gurudas of my childhood, now a Ramakrishna swami in gerua talking about "our" Order. But it did not seem at all strange to me, perhaps because so many years dropped off as I sat there. We all talked together; I can only remember his saying something to the effect that India is still perilous healthwise for Westerners; that the world is becoming increasingly small; that, yes, he remembered Ujjvala (Ida Ansell), Mrs. French (a distant cousin of mine who had been in India some thirty years before), and Swami "Trigunatit." Thinking how well Gurudas looked and how clear and keen his mind was, I was rather surprised when the swami in charge at Kankhal told us that Swami Atulananda was close to ninety.

We ate the vegetarian lunch that the Sevashrama served us, and then started out for Rishikesh with Brahmachari Seta. How is an earthly paradise described? And why should I think Rishikesh a paradise now when I did not while there? The road from Hardwar (Kankhal is really a part of Hardwar) to Rishikesh is through jungle. A jungle is not very different from a forest except that the underbrush is tangled thicker and, of course, the vegetation is tropical. And in a jungle are tigers, snakes, monkeys, parrots, spiders.

Brahmachari Seta, who speaks English very well, told us about the work of the hospital when we said that we were sorry to take him away from it. A few years ago two patients had been brought in suffering from tiger wounds. Tigers become man-eaters when they are no longer strong enough to bait their natural prey, or when weakened by gunshot wounds.

As we approached Rishikesh, we again saw the snow-covered Himalayas. After passing through the town proper,

we parked the car and walked toward the Ganges. On the way we saw only one holy man in his little hut. It was siesta time, about 1:30 P.M., and the other huts were all closed. This holy man appeared to have put a gray powder on his body; he had, I think, only a loin cloth on—we came on him so abruptly and so closely that it seemed impolite to stare although he was utterly oblivious to us. He had marks of Shiva on his forehead. There he was, immobile, sitting in yogi posture.

The situation of Rishikesh is one of the most beautiful that I have ever seen. The Ganges comes rushing, bending, and gushing between two heavily-wooded, sloping hills. On the path that we took leading to a bridge from which can be seen one of the most magnificent bends in the river were begging lepers—horrible, yet not horrible enough to destroy the power of the beautiful. It was as though the Ganges said, "Do everything you can—place beside me the most horrible of horrors—my beauty will overcome and endure." In the distance could be seen the couch of snow from which the Ganga arose, and on the river's side, retreats, so Brahmachari Seta told us, for the sadhus.

When we returned to our car about 2:30 P.M., our Sikh chauffeur was having trouble getting it started. The distance from Rishikesh to Hardwar is only fourteen miles, but it took us two and a half hours to make the trip. The car would start and then stop, eventually to stop altogether in the middle of the jungle. This did not seem alarming to me until I realized that in the jungle there is no American Automobile Association. The chauffeur worked away at the car with a worried look on his face, and Brahmachari Seta tried to flag down some passing cars while telling us that he was from Coorg where everyone is allowed to carry a gun. "I shot my first tiger," said he, "when I was fourteen."

"Well," thought I to myself, "if we have such an adept in tiger shooting with us, there is no cause to be anxious." Thereupon I got out of the car and peered into the jungle, never considering that Brahmachari Seta had no gun. Anyway, there was nothing much to see—an occasional parrot or monkey. The road itself was more interesting because on it would pass donkeys with bells on; colorfully clad women with huge silver bracelets on their ankles, and wide, full skirts; bullock-drawn carts with drivers muffled up in what I thought until now Arabian or Egyptian garb.

As the day drew toward sunset and darkness—there is next to no twilight in India—Brahmachari Seta decided to put us in a public carrier (bus) to Hardwar and to remain himself with the chauffeur, hoping that eventually some car would stop and render assistance. Just as he so decided, a bus loaded with people did stop, and the bus driver with his helpers threw down some not very strong looking rope. We were towed for about three quarters of a mile when, of course, the rope broke. But the bus driver promised that he would return, and five minutes before darkness set in he did. This time he had a strong, dependable rope; we got into his lumbering empty bus and were taken first to the bus depot repair shop where the little old Austin was dropped off with our chauffeur, and second to the Ramakrishna Sevashrama.

The knights of the road in India are, we judge, the bus drivers. They are also the taxis in Hardwar-Kankhal, because the bus waited as we washed up and then drove us within rickshaw-riding distance of the Brahma-kund, or pool of Brahma. Actually, this is the Ganges which is divided into two cool currents flowing on each side of a great brick ghat, a part of the Ganges Canal.

We arrived at the Brahma-kund too late for evening prayers (the Ganges is worshiped here); but the beauty of the

spot may have been enhanced by the relative quietness. On the great brick surface between the two arms of the Ganga were holy men singing, others reading from, maybe, the Bhagavad-Gita to small groups of people, men hawking tea and biscuits, beggars. The moon was almost full, so its play on the waters and on our spirits may have accounted in part for the peace we felt.

But the peace we felt may also have come from simple release. We could not drive back to Delhi that night; there was no longer any sense of urgency. Next morning we left at 6:00 A.M., having said, "Namaste—until we meet again," to the dear, motherly swami in charge. On Sunday we heard two fine lectures by the Delhi swami; on Monday drove to Agra, on Tuesday to Vrindaban—lovely Vrindaban which turned out to be another experience in contentment—then back to Delhi and finally Belur Math.

SINCE the weather had become much cooler, we went to Jayrambati and Kamarpukur, by way of Bishnupur. This was our first train trip in India, and was not half so bad as anticipated. The directions of the swami who took us to Howrah Station, the large train terminal for Calcutta, were very explicit: "Lock yourselves in and do not under any circumstances open the door until you arrive at Bishnupur." (There is no connection between compartments in Indian trains; each compartment is a separate unit opening directly outside, with attached lavatory, washbasin, and sometimes shower. The seats, which are lengthwise, have springs, and on them is placed the bed-roll which each person must provide for himself. I had, thank goodness, an air-mattress and a sleeping bag.

At 2:30 A.M. the train stopped. Judging the station to be Bishnupur, we peered out, to see Swami Prabhavananda's

brother, Mr. Gokul Ghosh, waiting on the platform. He took us to the guestroom of a small ashrama where about thirty-four young men are living according to the ideals of Swami Vivekananda, and where there is a temple to Sri Ramakrishna. This ashrama and temple are not yet parts of the Ramakrishna Order, but it is hoped that they will be someday. (Incidentally, this is how many of the centers started. The well-known Ramakrishna Mission Sister Nivedita Girls' School and Sarada Mandir, Calcutta, was started in 1898; but it was not made a branch of the Mission until 1918.)

I have mentioned hospitals so often that I have rather neglected the great educational (cultural, sociological, and technical) work of the Math and Mission. This is perhaps a good place to say something more of the educational work of the Mission because not far from Bishnupur is the village birthplace of Swami Prabhavananda, where another temple to Sri Ramakrishna has been erected by students of Swami Prabhavananda and where there is a small dispensary. (Neither of these is yet attached to the Ramakrishna Mission.)

The Indian village—the heart of India—has often been described. Only by seeing it can the ordinary American understand what is meant by poverty. This village of Surmanagar was obviously on no tourist route nor was it worse, I understand, than thousands of others; in fact, it was better by reason of the temple and dispensary. All the homes were huts made of mud with thatched roofs; dust was everywhere; clothes were negligible. But the doctor who was giving his services freely told us that the most frequent ailment was malnutrition and the most frequent cure was through faith.

Prime Minister Nehru is well aware of the conditions in the villages and is allotting many lakhs to proved organizations to train village workers. The Ramakrishna Order is one to which hundreds of thousands of rupees are going.

There is, for instance, just off the compound at Belur, the Ramakrishna Mission Sarada Pitha. This institution was started in 1941 and is divided into a wholly residential intermediate college affiliated with Calcutta University; a technical school; a school of adult social education; a school of religious instruction; and a graduate school for training young men to work with the villagers. Many of its professors are Hindus trained in social service work in the United States, but the management is wholly in the hands of the Ramakrishna Order, and as a consequence the religious attitude of the Order—seeing God in man—is inculcated.

Going into the villages from the Ramakrishna Mission Sarada Pitha is a mobile audio-visual unit propagating hygiene and general education, with a mobile library. This department further organized a number of centers for distributing free milk and food packages to the destitute. This is only one of eighty-seven centers in India, so the amount of help the Ramakrishna Order gives the villages can hardly be over estimated.

Another type of work which the Ramakrishna Order does and which impressed me was its care of orphans. About twelve miles out of Calcutta at Rahara is the Ramakrishna Mission Boys Home.

> It came into existence thirteen years back when the devastating famine of 1942-43 carried away millions of inhabitants of Bengal and left behind a host of orphans and destitutes roaming helplessly on the pavements of big towns in quest of food and shelter. The streets of Calcutta were strewn with the dead and dying in the terrible months of the latter half of 1943. Being moved by this national calamity, the authorities of the Ramakrishna Mission came forward to ameliorate in their humble way this distressing situation in collaboration with the Government and the

public by taking care of some of these helpless children. They started this BOYS' HOME in September, 1944, with 37 orphan boys on its rolls with a gift from the late Satish Chandra Mukherjee.

Starting with thirty-seven the home now has close to four hundred in residence; it admits "a number of day scholars . . . and gives opportunity to some of its old students for higher studies in colleges." It also has a library which not only serves the Home but also general readers in the community and a separate mobile section with a van which services forty-three rural libraries registered under it.

This quick growth is not only a result of the constant need in India but more particularly in Bengal where tragedy after tragedy fell in rapid succession. Having supplied patriots way out of proportion to her population in the struggle for independence, Bengal was visited by the devastating famine in 1942-43, by a blood bath in 1947 on the occasion of partition, and thereafter by the arrival of millions of refugees.

The Home is a brilliant success, whether it is viewed by oriental or occidental eyes. The occidental sees the numbers, the practicality of the teaching—all the boys are trained to earn a living—, the democracy—there is equality of opportunity. The occidental sees the Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home as an organizational success. The oriental does too, but for slightly different reasons. The oriental notices that it is a "Home," not an orphanage, that many of is supporters are its own graduates, that some of its graduates have become brahmacharis and are, of course, leading dedicated lives at the Home, their Home.

The swami who brought the Home into existence I did not meet because I visited the school on a holiday, and he had taken some of the boys on an excursion to see the Botanical

Garden, Howrah. But I have a photograph of him before me with his arm around one of his boys. The photograph is in the pamphlet report of the Home. There are three other men in the picture beside the swami, but the swami stands out: he is the mother, father, friend, bulwark of the innocent children whose paths in life but for him would be tragic in the extreme.

This Home, like so many of the other organizations of the Order, was started by private donation; it is now supported by the Indian Government with, of course, private donations still important in its functioning.

BUT THE WHOLE owes its existence to Sri Ramakrishna, whose birthplace we visited. Kamarpukur is an Indian village with huts of mud, with thatched roofs. Because the Ramakrishna Order is there, Kamarpukur does not seem so desolate as other villages. The tank by the side of the temple is lovely to look at, with flowers and trees surrounding it, and, I imagine, free from malaria-breeding mosquitoes. There are also three schools, a dispensary, and a library conducted by the Order.

There is the Shiva temple wherein Sri Ramakrishna's mother had a vision that she would bear a divine child, the tree under which Ramakrishna was first acknowledged an avatar, and the temple erected in his and his godmother's honor. His godmother was, by his insistence, a woman of the shudra, or fourth, caste whom he loved; so this temple shows how early Ramakrishna repudiated caste.

As we were resting in the guesthouse on the temple compound, we heard drums and bagpipes coming nearer and nearer. Not wanting to miss anything, we ran out to see a wedding procession approaching the temple. A gorgeously

dressed bride and groom were stepping out of palanquins, followed by villagers making up their wedding procession. These wedding guests, in contrast to the bridal couple, were drably dressed.

And then I saw the gerua-clad swami bringing into these people's lives some modicum of health through dispensaries, of education through schools, or religion through the swamis' daily lives and the happiness their being radiates. How anyone would prefer another color or richer apparel than the gerua is difficult to understand. For is it not the richest and most colorful dress? Is not the silver and gold thread running through the sari cheap in comparison? The freshly starched, the immaculate dhoti of the wealthy has not the purity of the gerua. The drab cloth of the poor is no less humble than the gerua, which goes among the lowest of the low.

But from the gerua's point of view, there are no such contrasts. For it, the problem of opposites does not exist: "Pity no more would be if all were as happy as we." If the millennium should come, and the poor, the uneducated, the sick ceased to be; if then compassion, pity, mercy were unnecessary, the swamis would not be different from what they now are, for to them there are ultimately no distinctions: all is spirit.

They have never had the audacity to look at man with mercy: "Who can show mercy to Him? No *mercy*, but *service* by looking upon man as God" is their ideal and practice. That another face of Shiva should be uncovered, that dear Sudhir Maharaj who manages, among other things, the guesthouse and calls me "Mother Dorothy" and asks me, "Can I go now?" should suddenly be serving something more worthy of his labor would not disturb his or any swami's equanimity. For as one said to me quite casually at Belur Math: "From bliss we come; in bliss we live; into bliss we shall return."

UNIVERSAL IMPERATIVES OF THE BHAGAVAD-GITA

SWAMI BUDHANANDA

THE Bhagavad-Gita is one of the most popular scriptures known to man. It has been translated into almost all the literary languages of the world. The immense popularity of this ancient scripture in the modern world is indeed a wonder.

Two reasons may be pointed out to explain the Gita's popularity. First, Sri Krishna, who is worshiped by millions of Hindus as God incarnate, was himself the teacher of this gospel. In a certain place Sri Krishna himself said: "The Gita is my heart, Arjuna—my very essence." In other words, the Gita contains the essence of divine wisdom. Second, the Gita is a truly universal gospel. It is an ancient scripture; but its fundamental teachings, being eternal and universal, have perfect relevancy for our times, and for our lives—individually, personally.

Anyone daily practicing a few teachings of the Gita will experience beneficial effects. He will be a better human being every succeeding day. He will overcome his difficulties more easily than others. He will discover an unending source of inspiration for his whole life. He will grow in strength, wisdom, inner stability, in one word—spirituality.

IN EVERY great scripture of the world there are three types of teachings. First, there are narrations of eternal truths, universally applicable, such as: "Truth alone triumphs, not falsehood." "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." A second type of teaching concerns the *ought*—what should be done and what should not be done, such as: "Whatever you give to others, give with love and reverence. Do not offer gifts with disdain in your heart. Gifts must be given in abundance, with joy, humility and compassion." In the third type of teachings there are the direct imperatives from the Lord: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Equally,

> Give me your whole heart,
> Love and adore me,
> Worship me always,
> Bow to me only,
> And you shall find me:

In the Bhagavad-Gita—which is one of the most comprehensive of all world scriptures—are to be found these three types of teachings. But of all the teachings in the Gita, the most important, significant, and helpful are those teachings of the Lord through which, with all his authority, wisdom, omniscience, and understanding, he directly commands us to do, or to refrain from doing, certain things. In such teachings the Lord speaks in powerful imperatives, sweeping aside all chance for argumentation on the part of the hearer. As such, the Lord uses imperatives not as a dictator, trying to exert his will, but as an omniscient benefactor, asking faltering man to do or not to do certain things, in order to help him toward his spiritual evolution and fulfillment.

Of the seven hundred verses in the Gita, in more than

sixty the Lord speaks in the imperative mood. Among those sixty-odd verses, in twenty-four the imperative mood is used to convey the Lord's direct commandments. In the remaining the imperative is used with conversational casualness, such as: "Listen, O Arjuna"; or 'Know this for certain."

We intend here to study these twenty-four imperatives and understand their universal applicability in our lives.

THE FIRST imperative of Sri Krishna in the Gita occurs in the third verse of the second chapter:

> **Do not yield to unmanliness, O Son of Pritha. It does not become you. Shake off this base faintheartedness and arise, O Scorcher of Foes.** *(II, 3)*

This verse is charged with enormous redeeming power. Proper understanding of it can restore life to a person half-dead, and clarity to a man most deeply confused.

Under what circumstances did Sri Krishna thunder this rebuke to Arjuna? It came about in this way. Two related Indian royal families had declared war on each other. By deceitful means the Kauravas drove out the Pandavas from their lawfully inherited share of the kingdom. Friends and relatives sought a reasonable and amicable settlement. Sri Krishna, who was kin to both families, tried his best to bring about an honorable settlement. The Pandavas were reluctant to go to war. But when Duryodhana, the spokesman for the Kauravas, declared that not even that much of land as could stand on the point of a needle would be given to the Pandavas, war became the only means for settling the dispute.

In response to an appeal from each of the parties, all the rulers and fighting men of India allied themselves to one

or the other of the parties. Krishna gave his army to the Kauravas and himself became a non-fighting ally of the Pandavas. He undertook to drive the chariot of Arjuna, the great general of the Pandava army.

It should be remembered that Krishna was not an ordinary human being, but an avatar—an incarnation of God—playing his part on the world stage, at a critical time in Indian history.

On the eve of battle Arjuna went to view the two armies poised for fighting. He almost fainted at the prospect of relatives and friends killing each other. Shaken and nervous, Arjuna told Krishna that he could see no good coming out of the war. It would only multiply sin and suffering. Indeed, he would rather die at the enemy's hands than kill. Arjuna gave cogent arguments in regard to the evils that would be multiplied by the conflict.

Arjuna's plea against war no doubt contained some logic. But, clearly, he was confused as far as the principles of righteous conduct under a given set of circumstances were concerned. In a declared war, coming about after all attempts at honorable, amicable settlement have failed, the commander of an army has no business to be squeamish or faint-hearted. He has to fight and not philosophize. He has to shoot and not sob. Therefore Sri Krishna administered shock treatment to Arjuna with that rebuke. And it worked as nothing else would have.

Sheer weakness often masquerades as piety and deludes a man. Whatever he does under that delusion is wrong; and can produce evil results. Sri Krishna, therefore, shattered Arjuna's delusion with a sudden blow. And then he proceeded to teach him in regard to higher truths and their place in life for the fulfillment of life's high destiny.

Undoubtedly this first great imperative of the Gita had

a tremendous effect on Arjuna's life, as well as on the outcome of the Kurukshetra war, and on Indian civilization itself. More important, however, is the fact that this imperative has a very crucial and far-reaching significance for every single person in the world.

The Gita is called the *moksha-shastra,* or the scripture which shows you the way to attain liberation. But the Gita does not propose to take you out of the context of your own life in order to make you wise and free. It proposes to inform and transform your life in all its details without doing any violence to the roots of your own being. The Gita teaches you to meet every situation of your life—not someone else's life—in a way which will be conducive to *your* spiritual progress. This "you" is anybody, anywhere in the world, no matter what religion he professes or whether he professes any religion at all.

It is significant that the Gita was taught in a battlefield, for it is in the greatest crises that the ministrations of the highest wisdom are most urgently called for. This, however, is not always very well understood. If we act in a crisis in a blind manner, we are sure to get battered and shattered. It is not the physical suffering alone that will be our lot under such circumstances. We shall, so to say, also damage our soul. Whether you like it or not, life is indeed a battlefield. You have to wrest everything out of it by fighting.

Generally speaking, in life we may have two aspirations: *abhyudaya,* or worldly prosperity; and *nishreyasa,* or spiritual illumination. To attain worldly prospertiy we have to fight with external nature and compete with our fellow human beings. To attain spiritual illumination we have to fight our inner nature, our lower propensities, and conquer them.

In any case, you are in a battlefield. You cannot escape this fact. You are required to fight bravely and withal dexter-

ously, if you intend to achieve your chosen ends. One who refuses to fight will not make any mark in life. For those who have not yet spiritually transcended the relativity of good and evil, fighting in the right manner with clean motive for a good cause is always good. Crisis after crisis, trial after tribulation, will come. You will have to stand firm and hold your ground in righteousness, before you can fight well and become victorious.

Those who get defeated in life are mostly victims of their own cherished and nourished weaknesses, doubts, indecisions, and cowardices. And these weaknesses have nowhere any root in the truth of your being. Therefore, the Lord's first imperative is directed towards strengthening man from within. Any help that a person is given without strengthening him from within is of little use, spiritually speaking. And after a person has been strengthened from within, it does not matter if no other help is given.

We will need to understand these truths about life. If you merely want to survive somehow in any situation of life, you will not survive at all. To be able even to survive, you must aspire to live. If you want just somehow to live, you will not live at all. To be able even to live, you must aspire to conquer. If you want just to conquer, you will not conquer at all. To conquer for all time you must aspire for that victory, which defeats none, but enlivens, ennobles, and enlightens everybody. And this can be done only by immolating the self totally for the happiness of the many, for the welfare of the many, in the manner of a Buddha, a Christ, or a Ramakrishna. In every sphere of life this is the law.

Do not curse yourself, or think lightly of yourself, for the Atman is all that you are. "That thou art." Be firm in this conviction. Throw out from your mind all ideas to the contrary. Do not curse the world, for it is God's. God is

here and now. God is in everything. God is everything. We may not have yet known it experientially. But nothing is truer than this. After realizing this fact, the sage of the Mundaka Upanishad exclaimed: "Yea, this is the best of the worlds; this is the best of the worlds." Indeed it is.

Thank the Lord, O moping man, O weeping man,
Thank the Lord, O groping man, O thankless man,
That the world is not other than what it is!
Here Karma works: you can do and undo.
Here mettle tells; good is valued.
Here austerities bear fruit.
Self-application is rewarded.
Sincerity is understood, murder known.
Here seeds sprout, flowers blossom, fruits ripen;
You cannot escape here blessings of virtue and burnings of sin.
Here the wheel comes full circle, without stopping anywhere.
Here oppressor's head someday rolls on the ground.
Deferred justice is referred to and applied.
Here truth always triumphs, never falsehood.
Here hatred never succeeds, love never fails.
Here if you bring light darkness everywhere disappears.
Here there is no dogmatism except in minds of perverted men.
Here no doubt a sword-thrust brings forth flowing gush
    of warm red blood.
Again, here wounds are healed,
Tears are wiped, prayers are heard:
Here, in God's world, you can die and be reborn.
Here God is seen. Aye, God is verily seen!
Here you can become liberated while living in this body.
Where could you find, O foolish man, a better world than
    this world of cause and effect, of sowing and harvesting?
Moreover, of grace?

Whom can you truly blame in this world, if you would at all, except yourself? Are you really failing, being defeated? Then know for certain it is not because the world is wicked,

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but because you are weak. And you are weak not because you are really weak, but because you have not cared to tap and use your neglected strength.

Are you in a crisis? Are you in a difficult situation? Then the first thing for you to do is to hold on with all your might to this teaching of Sri Krishna: "Yield not to unmanliness." In these words of the Lord there is power to rejuvenate the whole world.

Why should you not yield to unmanliness? Simply because: It just does not become you. It is beneath your dignity—you, the Atman. It is beneath your dignity, because within you is *all* strength! You are the Atman, which fire cannot burn, sword cannot pierce, air cannot dry, water cannot drown: you are the immortal spirit, over whom even all-destroying death has no power. Nothing but this in you makes sense. Above all this is something we require to hear.

Weakness is that fictitious state of your being, is that self-falsification, which you find yourself to have when you become oblivious to your inalienable high connection with God; or when you forget that you are not just this much flesh and bone, but the Atman.

Therefore, in his first imperative, Sri Krishna builds the foundation, without which you can do nothing worthwhile in life, but on which you can build any superstructure.

First banish all weakness from within you. Swami Vivekananda says: "Know that all sins and all evil can be summed up in that one word—weakness. It is weakness that is motive power in all evil-doing." Therefore banish all weakness. Be a man. Be a woman, heart-whole, full stature. Then invade life and make out of it whatever you choose.

In the second line of the verse, the Lord says: "Shake off this faint-heartedness and arise, O Scorcher of Foes." When it does not become you to yield to weakness, what

should you do? You have only to shake it off as you would a creeping snake from your body. Fill your inside with courage and faith, and arise with firm determination to face up to whatever life may bring you. Face hard facts with harder determination. Remember, there is nothing in this universe more powerful than the spirit of man. Assert your might. Blast your problems with the power of your character, born of Atman-awareness. It is not external oppositions, problems, or temptations that destroy a person. But it is the subversion from within which functions in devious forms of rationalized, sanctified, and ritualized weakness.

No weakness of yours, however, can be afforded any moral sanction whatever. Weakness has nothing moral about it. It is the matrix of all immorality in the world. It has, in fact, no roots in you. It is just none of your business to be weak. You may have any number of faults. You may have committed any number of sins. Never mind. Only do not sin anymore. Strength is forever your birthright, for the Divine Mother is not your stepmother, but your very own mother, as Sri Ramakrishna says.

Being fed by negative thoughts all the time, we have either become weak or wicked. Let us throw them off, as the Lord says, and arise out of somnambulism, and awake out of stupor. Dehypnotize yourself. It is indeed very important to have shaken off unmanliness, given up faint-heartedness, and arisen.

BUT NOW, practically speaking, after awakening what are you going to do with yourself? This awakened self will now have to be trained in a special way, for the fulfillment of your great destiny. In his subsequent imperatives Sri Krishna clearly points out how this is to be done. He says:

That by which all this is pervaded, that know for certain to be indestructible. None can cause destruction of what is Immutable. *(II, 17)*

This is the beginning of the training of the awakened self. The awakened self must stay aware of its imperishability.

When you are aware, even theoretically, that you are the indestructible spirit, you function in one way. Should you consider yourself otherwise, you function in a different way. You are either a lion or a jackal. In fact, without being aware of one's imperishability, one can never have a spiritually sound and rewarding perspective of life. All other views of life fall short of the highest truth about yourself; hence are unsound.

With this right perspective born of your awareness of the imperishability of your soul, what are you expected to do? The Lord says:

Being established in yoga, perform your actions, casting off attachment and remaining even-minded both in success and failure. This evenness is called yoga. *(II, 48)*

To the imperishable that you essentially are, success cannot add anything; for the same reason, failure cannot take away anything from you. When you stay aware of this fact, the mind will develop a propensity for evenness, which is the secret of yoga. Without even-mindedness there cannot be any true spirituality. Mere action is inferior to action performed with evenness of mind.

Hence, proceeding, the Lord says:

Seek refuge in this evenness. *(II, 49)*

In other words, practice this evenness of mind incessantly, in order to be well grounded in this fundamental discipline.

What will you attain by being grounded in this discipline? Being grounded in evenness of mind, you will develop the power to cast off the binding effect of karmas, good and bad.

This skill in action is also called yoga, which is productive of liberating power and ineffable bliss. Hence the Lord says in the next imperative:

Therefore strive for this yoga. *(II, 50)*

Now, naturally the question arises, when yoga depends on evenness of mind, why not give up all work, for it is work which generates all kinds of huff and puff, tensions, and difficulties in human relations?

Oh no, says the Lord, you just cannot do that. For even the bare maintenance of your body will not be possible if you remain inactive. The Lord, therefore, says:

Do your allotted action. *(III, 8)*

Whatever action you have come to have on hand by righteous means at any stage of life—that is your allotted action. Through doing that alone, with evenness of mind, you are bound to grow spiritually.

True, work can create bondage. Again, through work alone we have to find our salvation. The world, says Sri Krishna, becomes bound by action unless the action is done "for the sake of the sacrifice"; in other words, unless it is done as an offering unto the Lord.

The strategy is to get God somehow involved with everything we think or do.

Suppose you have a flashlight tied on your forehead. Then you may enter into a dark cave. You may turn in different directions, but you cannot help seeing all things before you lighted. With God as the guiding spirit, whatever we may think or do can only bring us liberation.

So says Sri Krishna in the next imperative:

> **Therefore, give up attachment, and do your work for the sake of the Lord.** *(III, 9)*

That is very well said and easily said, too. We would like to do it. But what do we do, then, with our household work, office work—work that is somehow "our work"—in the kitchen, in the garden, in the workshop, in clinics, in firms, in studios?

This brings us to one of Sri Krishna's most helpful teachings. The Lord shows us the skill and technique of transforming every work—"our work"—into a spiritually liberating instrument. His next imperative is:

> **Always do without attachment the work you have to do; for a man who does his work without attachment attains the Supreme.** *(III, 19)*

This is, however, more easily said than done, this working without attachment. All sorts of questions and doubts arise in our mind. Yet we know that this is a magnificent precept.

No one knows our difficulties in this matter better than Sri Krishna. So he further instructs us and teaches us the technique of such action:

> **Surrendering all actions to the Lord, with mind centered on the Self, getting rid of hope and selfishness, fight—free from mental fever.** *(III, 30)*

Yes, we want to. But we cannot. Why can't we fight without mental fever? Who prevents us from doing this? Alas! No one from outside. It is our uncontrolled senses that cloud our vision and subvert our will. We know what is right, but we cannot do it; we know what is wrong, but we cannot desist from doing it.

So SAYS Sri Krishna in his following imperative, in the most understandable way:

> **Therefore, at the outset, control the senses, and slay this foul destroyer of knowledge and liberation.** *(III, 41)*

Further:

> **Destroy this enemy who comes in the guise of desire and is hard to overcome.** *(III, 43)*

Now, do not be frightened at the prospect of having to do something impossible. You are not being asked to blaze a new path with all its hazards. People in ancient times, the seekers of liberation like you, knew this and worked like this. It is the path which has been tried and found helpful.

So the Lord says persuasively:

> **Therefore, do your work in the manner the ancients did in olden times.** *(IV, 15)*

All those doubts and other obstacles can be surmounted only by firm resolution to become a yogi. It is not that a particular type of person only has to and can become a yogi. Every person who does not want to stay a fool of the world,

a creature of maya or spiritual ignorance, must aim at becoming a yogi. Through whatever he does in life, he should seek union with the Supreme Spirit.

The yogi is greater than men of austerities, greater than men of knowledge, greater than men of action. So the Lord insists:

Therefore, become a yogi, O Arjuna. *(VI, 46)*

Do not say: "O, I am a householder. I cannot become a yogi." Arjuna was a householder. Sri Krishna asked him to become a yogi. But how do you become a yogi? Where do you have to go to become a yogi? You have not to go anywhere. In your own apartment you can become a yogi. It is so easy! And so great indeed is the challenge.

Sri Krishna teaches the easiest way of becoming a yogi, and in effect, of conquering the battle of life. He says:

Therefore, at all times remember me and fight. *(VIII, 7)*

What is yoga in practice? Sri Ramakrishna says it is linking or uniting the mind with God, somehow or anyhow. Life is a battlefield. Here you must fight to win. If, however, you fight with mental fever, then you are sure to lose the battle, for that will make you forget God. To forget God is to be reduced to dust and straw, mud and filth. How can mere dust and straw win against all the forces of life? Christ very significantly said: "Without me ye can do nothing."

The battle of life will be won only if you constantly remember God and fight. When you remember God and fight, you are then armed with God's wisdom and power. You then become invincible. No power on earth can then defeat you.

THE SNAG, however, comes here. How to remember God constantly?

Well, what makes you forget God? Is it not your work or your various other preoccupations? But suppose you do your work, every bit of it, for the sake of God alone, then how can you forget him?

So comes the Lord's most strategic imperative:

> **Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give away, and whatever you practice in the form of austerities—do it all as an offering to God.** *(IX, 27)*

Here is the secret of remembering God constantly: to do everything as an offering to God.

Yet the wayward mind may ask obstinately: "How am I to do everything for God? Why should I?"

If you only know how tenderly the Lord watches over you, protects you at every step, you would not find it difficult to do everything for the Lord's sake. If you were convinced that God loves you—and that he is more loyal to you than you ever had the capacity of being to him, then, for sheer love's sake you would delight in doing everything for the Lord's sake.

Indeed, in order to assure us that God loves us, Sri Krishna anxiously makes it a point to say:

> **Proclaim it boldly, O Son of Kunti, that my devotee never perishes.** *(IX, 31)*

There are various concepts of God. Some concepts place you on the run after a continually receding God. He is like a mirage in the desert. He is constantly the conqueror. And you are perpetually the fool.

Deal not with this indifferent, this ever-receding, God. Let him go his way. Go after the anxious God, the God of love. Go after the God who watches your steps as you move away and celebrates your return when you come back. Go after the manward-moving, anxious God.

This manward-moving God wants you to know that by loving him you can become indestructible. Almost impatient to insure your safety, Sri Krishna importunes:

> **Having come unto this transitory, joyless world, worship me.** *(IX, 33)*

Moreover:

> **Fix your mind on me, be devoted to me, sacrifice to me, bow down to me.** *(IX, 34)*

What a heart-rending agony of the Highest! God coming and begging for your love. Whoever understands this anguish of God—the poor, poor thing!

After giving himself away in a general way the Lord wants to be sure that he has reached you in a personal way too. So he says:

> **Fix your mind on me alone, rest your thoughts on me alone, and in me alone you will live hereafter. Of this there is no doubt.** *(XII, 8)*

But could it not be that someone would be unable to pin his mind on God? Should he be left without grace because he is unable to lodge God in his heart?

This is unbearable to the anxious God, who is law, no doubt, but particularly is love. So even before being asked, the Lord says:

> **If you are unable to fix your mind steadily on me, then seek to reach me by yoga of constant practice.** *(XII, 9)*

But could it not again be that some are unable even to do this yoga of constant practice? Will they be lost because they do not know how to keep their minds centered in God? Such a prospect is not bearable to the anxious Lord. So he exclaims:

> **If you are incapable of constant practice, then devote yourself to my service. For, even by rendering service to me for my sake only, you will attain perfection.** *(XII, 10)*

Could it not be again that there is a poor pathetic fool somewhere like me who cannot do even this? What will happen to him? Will there be no grace for the hapless, nay the least?

With what tenderness, what unthinkable understanding the Lord comes to our level and says these soul-soothing words:

> **If you are unable to do even this, then be self-controlled, surrender the fruit of all action, and take refuge in me.** *(XII, 11)*

The Lord has given us all that he could give by way of helping us to proceed step by step toward the fulfillment of our high destiny, which is union with the Supreme Spirit.

But then, but then, how many of us are capable of taking such ever-wakeful spiritual care of ourselves? After advancing two steps do we not next seem to fall back five, out of sheer inner exhaustion? Then are we going to be buried in ignominy under the debris of our futile spiritual efforts? Have we then no spiritual future?

The Lord in effect says: Who says you haven't? You have rather a more assured future.

To have finally known that, left to yourself, you can not, is to have at long last known that God alone can. That is resignation, when you have really known it. Do not then worry in the least.

In order to get us grounded in this state through life's functional process, the Lord had earlier exhorted:

Arjuna, be an instrument in God's hand. *(XI, 33)*

Allow God to course through your being. That is wisdom attained.

Then, concentrating all his compassion in one supreme imperative, the Lord opens the floodgate of his grace on all seekers for all time. He says:

Abandon all formalities of religion and come to me alone for shelter. I shall deliver you from all sins. Do not grieve. *(XVIII, 66)*

SUCH are the universal, and yet so personal, imperatives of the Bhagavad-Gita, the Lord's direct thrusts into our souls.

It would appear that it is not a case of our knocking and God's opening. The case really is of God's knocking and knocking, and perchance our opening. He has tried in ever so many ways down the ages. In this anxious and vibrant way, in this direct, appealing, and imploring way in the Gita he keeps on trying, keeps on crying, keeps on calling, "Come unto me!"

Should we not respond? Can we have the heart not to respond?

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